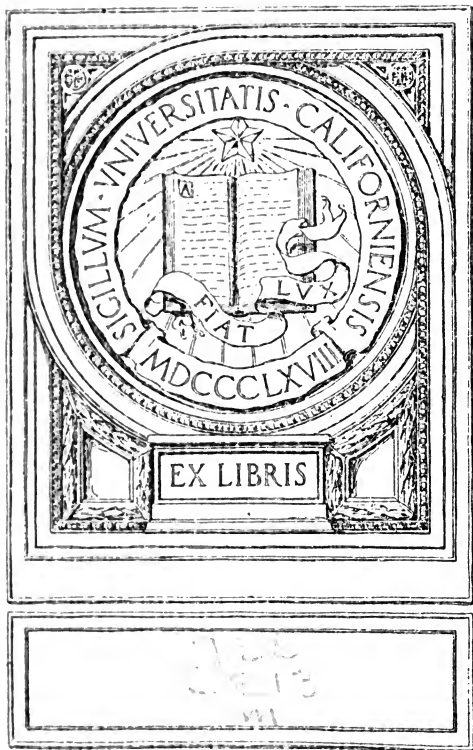




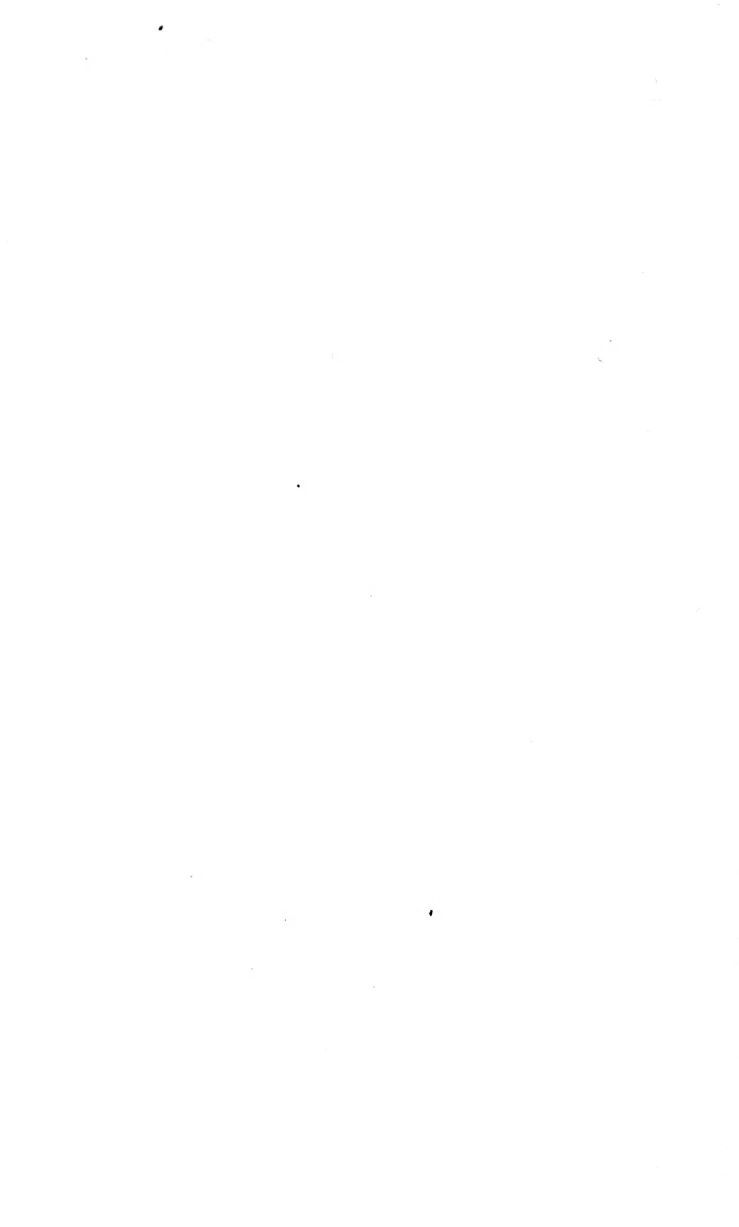
Marmaduke

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F. A. STEEL





Marmaduke



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By

Flora Annie Steel

Author of

"On the Face of the Waters," "A Sovereign Remedy,"
"King-Errant," etc.



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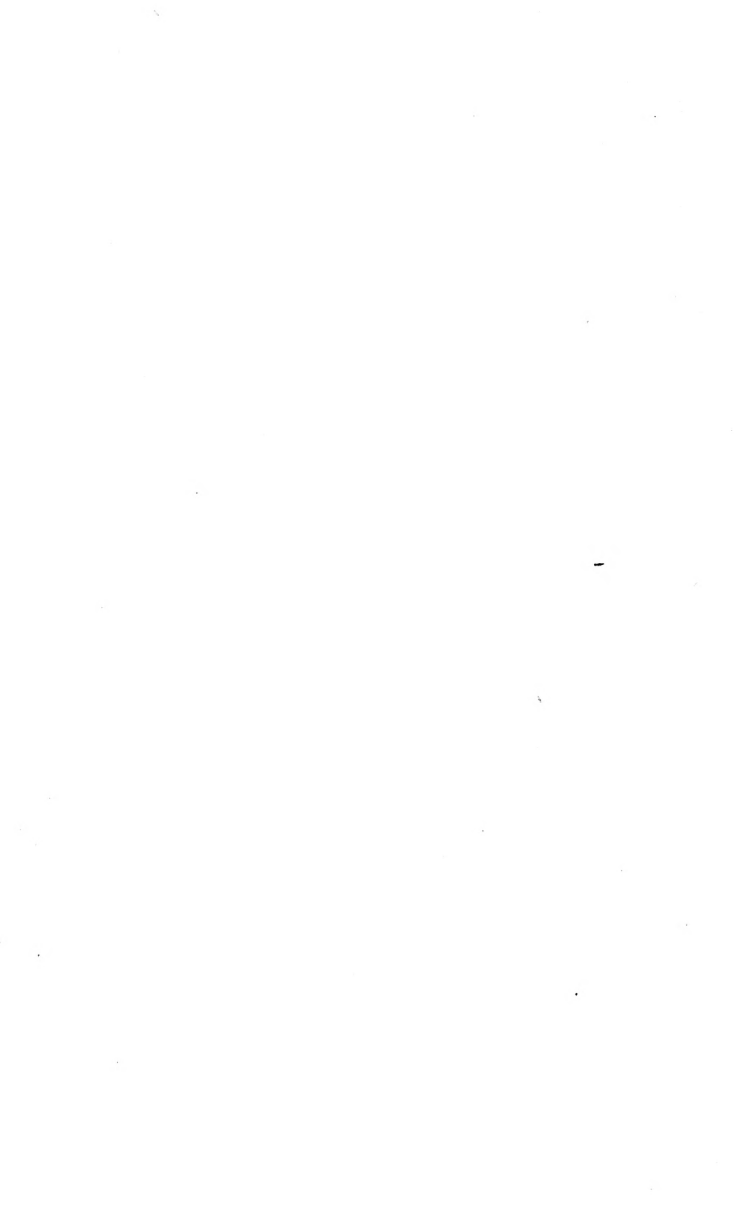
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BOOK I

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CHAPTER I

"HELLO, Davie! Is that you, Davie Sim?" cried a joyous young voice; then it changed suddenly, with a verve which showed pure delight in the unfamiliar yet familiar dialect, from correct English to the broadest Aberdeenshire accent. "Eh, mon, ye're joost the same ow'd tod o' a pease-bogle wi' yer bonnet ajee, an' a crookit mou'; yen hauf given tae psaulm singin' and tither tae pipe-blawing!" The voice paused a bit breathlessly as if it had exhausted itself over the unwonted exercise, then went on in slightly less aggressive Doric. "Well, I'm blythe to see you lookin' sae weel. An' is that tall lass Marrion?"

An easy gallantry came to his tones as the speaker, a fine young fellow of obviously military bearing, turned to a girl who stood very still by the window.

"By gad," the young man went on with the same easy condescension, "you have grown into a pretty girl! Give us a kiss, my dear; you know you used to be fond of 'Mr. Duke' in the——"

Then suddenly silence fell between the two young people. Something in the tall still figure by the window seemed to abash the tall figure making its way easily towards it, and left them looking at each other critically.

They were as fine a couple physically as God ever made to come together as man and woman. They were almost alike in stature and strength—she slightly the smaller—and both seemed equal in abounding health, though he

was florid and she somewhat pale with the pallor of the thick creamy skin that goes with red-bronze hair.

She spoke at last, the thin curves of her mouth clipping her words sharply.

"There's mony to tell me yon and crave kisses since you an' me was hafflins together, Mr. Duke," she said coolly. "I beg yer pardon, Captain Marmaduke!"

The Honourable Captain Marmaduke Muir, second son of the sixteenth Baron Drummuir of Drummuir, home on leave after an absence of ten years on foreign service, looked at the grand-daughter of his father's head piper and general majordomo as if considering anger. He was too good looking to be accustomed to such rebuffs from pretty girls, especially when they were manifestly beneath him in station. Then suddenly he laughed. The years had fled, and he was a boy again in fast fellowship with a small hoyden of a girl; a girl four years his junior, but infinitely his superior in common sense; a girl who had kept him out of many a scrape and who hadn't scrupled on occasion to box his ears, young master though he was. With a sudden flash of memory the occasion came back to him, and he saw himself, a strong lad of fourteen, wading a swollen stream with the ten-year-old girlie on his back, a string of handsome trouties he had been catching hanging like a tail from his hands clasped behind his burden. He heard the agonised cry in mid-stream, "They're slippin', Maister Duke, they're slippin'! Let me down till I hoosen them up!" He heard the stiff reply: "Let 'em slip; I'll no let ye down tae soak ye through!" And then the woeful battle of wills that ensued, while the trouties slipped from the string one by one. A battle which ended in a sobbing

girlie ankle deep in water, an empty string, and a defiant lad with young crimson ears. He felt his mature ones tingle with amusement at the recollection, and at the recognition that the girlie was as ready of resentment as ever.

"Ods bobs, Marmie!" he cried, his face full of mischief. "It seems you've no forgotten the whaur-aboots of my lugs," and his hands went up to his face as if to protect them.

The girl crimsoned.

"I begged your pardon then, Captain Marmaduke, and I beg it again if I've offended——" she began defiantly.

He interrupted her with an absolutely charming smile, a deference that was unanswerable.

"And I beg yours for remembering what I should have forgotten. So we are quits and can surely shake hands on it like the good friends we always were, and"—here his voice took on additional charm—"always will be. Of that I am sure."

His bold blue eyes were on hers frankly, and she gave him back his look steadily. So they stood, shapely hand in shapely hand, for a second. Then his left fingers caught at hers and felt the first one inquisitively.

"Hullo, seamstress, that's new?" he queried, evidently pleased with his own cleverness in detection.

Marrion Paul drew her hand away sharply.

"I've been at the dressmaking in Edinbro' these six years since grandfather married," she replied coldly.

Marmaduke looked at Davie Sim incredulously.

"What, Davie! You old reprobate, who the deuce did you get to marry you?"

There was no answer. Possibly Davie did not hear, for he was rootling round the kitchen fire with the poker—a most unnecessary task that sweltering June day. Perhaps, also, it was flame-reflection which made his face show red under the wide Tam o' Shanter bonnet he invariably wore in his own house; why it would be difficult to say, except that outside the precincts of home he was for ever doffing it before somebody or another. For Davie Sims had been born hereditary servitor to the Drummuir family, and had every intention of dying in the same position.

"He married Penelope from the castle," came Marrion's voice relentlessly, "and his lordship gave her away."

"The devil he did," remarked the young man helplessly to both pieces of information, after a moment's pause due evidently to mingled outrage and amusement. "Well," he added, in male defiance of the woman's point of view, "I expect she makes him an excellent wife."

"Most excellent!" assented Marrion, with a curl of her lip. "So, as she happens to be gone on a visit, I have come back to stay a while—a little while—with grandfather."

Her diction, bar the one slight slip, was as free from provincialism as his own, and Marmaduke Muir looked at her appreciatively. She was different from the hoyden he had left. Perhaps in Edinburgh she had gone in for classes. And she was better looking too, though much too tall for a woman. Then her mouth, though passable in its thin decided curves, was far too wide for beauty.

Still, she was altogether sufficiently pleasant to look upon for Marmaduke to feel it necessary for him to charm. Not that either by nature or art he was a lady-killer.

To do him justice, he would have felt just the same had the attraction been male or neuter. Simply he always desired to please what was pleasant to himself, and his tastes were catholic.

So he said almost sentimentally :

"Well, I am very glad you're here. We shall be able to spend our birthdays together as we used to in the old times. Eighteenth of June! Waterloo day! Good heavens, I can scarcely believe that I shall be thirty to-morrow, and you?" He positively blushed, for in the year 1848 it was almost indecent for an unmarried woman to be six-and-twenty. Marrion, however, had no such qualms.

"Twenty-six," she said calmly; perhaps she knew she did not look it.

"Anyhow," he went on hastily, as if to escape from an unwelcome fact, "I have brought you a present from foreign parts." He had not even thought of one; in fact, he had only given his old playmate a passing remembrance, wondering whom she had married; but he knew his boxes contained enough trifles for the home folk to enable him to spare one, and he could no more help trying to charm than he could help breathing. "And now," he added, "I must be off. Tell me, Davie, like a good soul, where I am likely to find his lordship this time of day. I'm cursed early," he continued a bit ruefully, "but that's the worst of me. I'm always in such a devil of a hurry."

"You came across the ferry?" asked Marrion sympathetically.

He turned to her at once.

"Yes. It was the first coach. I wouldn't wait for the

later one. And then when I got to the Cross Keys and saw the old place over the water, I wouldn't wait to go round by the bridges. So Andrew—you remember Andrew Fraser, of course?—'pon my soul, he's been a first-class orderly ever since he joined, and I don't know what I should have done without him; nursed me like a mother when I'd fever and all that sort of thing—a real honest good chap. Well, he got out the valise and carried it down the ferry road. I didn't know, you see, that the ferry was disused; but we luckily found someone's boat—and here I am—too soon!"

"I'm thinkin'," said Davie Sim, with caution, "that his lordship at this hour will, mayhap, be inspec'in' the pigstyes."

"Pigstyes!" echoed Marmaduke theatrically. "Say not so! Dash it all, I can't do prodigal in a pigstye! I demand a byre and a fatted calf. Well, I suppose I had better ring at the front door and ask the butler if my Lord Drummuir is at home like any orra' stranger. So—ta, ta, for the present!"

He waved an easy hand to Marrion as he passed out. She hesitated a second, then followed him into the sunlit courtyard and called—

"Captain Duke!"

He turned, looking so handsome and débonnaire that her purpose almost wavered. Why should she pour gall and wormwood into his cup of life before circumstances made the bitter inevitable? Still, since it had to come, and that shortly, it was as well he should be prepared for it. So much depended on the relations between him and his father that it was better he should not be taken un-
awares.

"If you are wanting to see his lordship the now," she said, her phrasing astray once more under pressure of other thoughts, "you wad find him in the south avenue. He was there when I came frae the town the now, cutting away at yen of the big beech trees."

"Cutting at a big beech tree! What the deuce do you mean?" queried Marmaduke incredulously.

She replied calmly, conclusively.

"Just that he must hae gotten a letter from your brother the Master. It aye angers him so that he orders out the men with the hatchets. It's as well you should know."

He stood staring at her. It was no news to him, of course, even though mails had been infrequent during those ten years, that there was an open breach between his father and the heir, nor was he unaware of his father's savage temper; that, and the impossibility of getting a decent allowance to enable him to live in England being responsible for those same ten years of foreign service. But distance softens shadows; besides, the very idea that a man could go and cut down historical trees just to spite another man was foreign to Marmaduke's nature.

"Oh, curse the whole lot!" he broke out at last. "Upon my soul I'll go back to the East—it isn't half a bad place—or wouldn't be if one only had a little tin—besides, I must get the money for my majority."

His words, following his impulsive thoughts, made Marrion smile indulgently.

"I wouldn't if I was you, Mr.—I mean Captain Duke," she remarked, with a twinkle in her eye. "Mayhap, my lord will bury the hatchet now you're home, if ye don't anger him." She looked pretty with that half-mischievous smile, and the sight cheered Marmaduke instantly.

“What a wise lassie you always were, Marmie,” he said, with wilful charm, “and what a lot of scrapes you’ve gotten me out of, and what a lot you’d get me out of, if you were only bound up with me like the Shorter Catechism was by mistake with Tristram Shandy—d’you remember? Good lord, I’ve forgotten my duty to my neighbour! However, here goes, and I’ll do my best not to anger the baron! You see, I must get the money for my majority,” he added, half to himself, as he spun round on his heel rather dramatically.

In fact, there was no denying it, the Honourable Marmaduke Muir was a trifle flamboyant as he swaggered across the courtyard which led from the old keep of Drummuir Castle to the southern and modern portion of the building. Marrion Paul watched the figure with a certain distaste. Perhaps, she thought, it was only the ultra-fashionable dress, the all too palpable fit-out of a smart military tailor, eager for a bill, that clashed with the grim old walls. Inside he had seemed much the same as she remembered him. Kindly, affectionate, not over wise, but charming, absolutely charming. And, after all, who was she to judge a gentleman born? That question was a hard one to answer. Her mother had undoubtedly been Maggie Sim, old Sim’s daughter, who had been maid to the first Lady Drummuir. But her father had been Paul, the foreign valet, whom Lord Drummuir’s younger brother had brought over with him when he was invalided from the diplomatic service. A very decent, respectable sort of chap, as old Sim admitted even while he objected strongly to his daughter’s marriage. Not without reason it turned out, since Paul, after tending his sick master with unremitting care and resource until his death, dis-

appeared the day of the funeral, leaving his young wife expecting her first child. And he had never been heard of since. That Mrs. Paul should pine away and die early was, the folk about said, only to be expected, for Paul, despite his foreign birth, had been a man to be regretted—a man who had a way with him which his daughter had inherited. She, however, would never hear a word in his favour, and nothing made her more angry than to find in herself little traits of character unaccountable to her sturdy Scots upbringing.

So she told herself that she was no judge of what a gentleman's dress or deportment should be, and turned at the sound of a footstep coming through the archway of the keep behind her to greet the newcomer with a more effusive welcome than she would otherwise have given the young man who came towards her carrying a valise on his shoulder. He set down his burden and grasped her outstretched hand in a sort of transport.

"Ah, Marrion—Marrion, my lass!" he cried. "God, but it's gude to see you once mair!"

The words summed him up from the crown of his head to the tips of his toes. You might have spent long hours in analysing Andrew Fraser's mind and body at that particular moment, and you would have got no nearer the mark, since for the time being existence was sheer gladness because of the sight of a woman.

"And I've brocht him safe home as ye bade me when I joined. Ye'll have seen him yerself. He's fine, isn't he?"

There was a world of pride in his tone; the pride of the soldier-servant who is responsible for the smartness of his master's outturn.

"Aye!" assented Marrion, grimly recognising that the figure before her was more to her mind in some ways than the other which had gone swaggering through the quadrangle. This one was broader in the chest, simpler in its ugly angular face and small pathetic-looking blue eyes, and simple—oh, so irritatingly simple!—in the devotion writ large in its every look, its every intonation.

"Well, I'm glad you're both home safe," she said, putting the barrier of refined speech between them. Then a resentment, of which she was innately ashamed even while she yielded to it, made her add: "And I suppose you've brought home a wife on the strength of the regiment?"

Andrew Fraser stared for a second, then shouldered his valise again deftly—

"Ye ken fine, Marrion Paul," he said sternly, as he went on, "that there never was but ae woman in the wurld for me, an' never will be."

And so he left her feeling small and mean.

She watched him across the courtyard following on his master's steps. A fine figure of a man. No swagger there, nothing to clash with the grey old walls.

But that made no difference, no difference at all. That was the worst of it.

CHAPTER II

MARMADUKE MUIR had meanwhile found his familiar way through the low arch which, piercing the extreme corner of the eastern side of the quadrangle, formed the connecting link between the older part of Drummuir Castle and the new. For the rest, this eastern wall showed blank save for a loophole or two. It was, in effect, simply the back wall of what in Scotland is called the square; that is, the continuation of stables, cow-houses and woodsheds which appertain to a country mansion in the north. It had evidently been built as a wind-screen to the western wing, which, overlooking the river, had been the residential portion of the house before the southern wing had been added to close in the quadrangle. Altogether it was a fine old place, magnificently situated in the slight hollow which dipped between the high old red sandstone cliffs of the Aberdeenshire coast, and the lower yet still high old red sandstone cliffs which for a mile or two formed the eastward bank of the river Drum. Standing still on the grass-plot in the centre of the courtyard a quick ear could detect two water sounds—the rhythmic roll of the waves of the North Sea on the one hand, and the incessant rush of the running river on the other.

Marmaduke did not pause to listen. He only felt a thrill of pride in the beauty of the stern old place before he passed through the arch into totally different sur-

roundings. Here were wide well-kept lawns, beds of rhododendrons, then somewhat of a novelty, and in those northern climes ablaze with blossom this middle June. Further afield lay a typical East Aberdeenshire landscape of rolling arable land set with square plantations of wood and dotted at sparse intervals with solid grey granite farm-houses. Behind him, despite its wide portico and Grecian balustrade, the new wing of the old castle looked stern and stubborn as the rest.

He stood for a moment on the curving flight of massive steps and drew in a long breath of satisfaction; for right in front of him stretched something that once seen could never be forgotten. People came from far for a sight of the great beech avenue of Drummuir. And what they went out for to see was worth the seeing.

A cathedral aisle, not made by hand, solemn, serene. Soft sunlight filtering through a vaulted roof of leaves, wide spandrils of brown branches sweeping to wide arch from the pillars of the mighty tree trunks—a tessellated pavement of shade and shine.

He had seen the sight a thousand times, yet it brought now, as it had always brought, a vague wonder as to the long years since those giant beeches had sent their first feeler into Mother Earth's bosom. But, as ever, after the manner of such idle human wonders when confronted with the permanence of what men class as lower life, it passed, contentedly unsatisfied, to a flood of remembrance. How frightened he had been as a little chap when his nurse had dragged him home to bed—dark, lonely bed!—through those solemn shadows in the gloaming. He had changed, but the avenue had not. It was just the same. No, hardly! There was more

shafted sunlight in the distance surely? And that rasping sound in the air—what was it?

Surely a cross-cut saw at work! Then Marmie had as usual told the truth. His father must be cutting down one of the historic beech trees, and there was no need to ring and ask for Lord Drummuir—no need at all! He was to be found as usual ungovernable, insensate, intolerant. A whole youth of rebellion stormed through Marmaduke Muir's mind as, at quick march, he fumed down to where the shameful deed was being done.

From far he could see it was in full swing. The team of horses ready to give the final pull, the stays to other trees, the whole paraphernalia of destruction including the cluster of workmen busy round the doomed tree. And see! Safe to windward—aye, you bet, safe, jolly safe!—the knot of spectators gathered round a bath-chair. That held his father, of course. And the others? They would not be the old sycophants possibly, but they would be of the same kidney. A woman, too! Not his half-sisters—they, poor souls, would be weeping in the dower house over the injury to their brother the heir and to the heirloom beech! And it would not be Penelope—she had been handed over to Davie Sim. By Jupiter, it was too bad! He quickened his pace, fretted by the rush of bitter resentment; then paused suddenly—

Hist! The melodious whistle of a blackbird overhead ceased, and a little rustling sound asserted itself above the constant burring of the saw. The squirrels were leaping from branch to branch.

“Look to yersels—look to yersels! She's yieldin'! Stan' clear for your life. Stan' clear! She yieldin'!”

The cry rose none too soon. There was an instant's

hurry, then an instant's intense silence, on which came a sharp crack like a pistol-shot, as the fine old tree, less tough than men had reckoned it, tilted slowly as if uncertain which way to seek its grave. So while men held their breath it stood arrested, defiant; then with a roar and a rush, a swish of sweeping branches, a surging of green leaves, it sank like the tumultuous onrush of some mighty wave, to fall a confused tumbling heap of shade and shine upon the kindly earth exactly where the wit of man had destined it to lie.

A noisy clapping of hands and a high-pitched feminine laugh rose from about the bath-chair; but, ere the applause ceased, a young accusing figure positively flaming with wrath had sprung forward, leaped upon the sawn root of the fallen tree, and so framed as with a halo by the new-cut bole—which measured over seven feet in diameter—bawled out in a voice quivering with sheer passion:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir! Go home to bed, you miserable old gouty cripple; you've done enough mischief for one day!"

Marmaduke was given to being dramatic, but he had never been more effective than at that moment. He stood his ground like a young avenging angel, secretly elated at having done the business thoroughly well and defied his father, despite Marrion Paul's advice. He almost smiled at the thought of her dismay. Meanwhile, the face of the old man in the bath-chair had grown positively purple with anger, and the colour did not improve the heavy contours of chin, double chin, treble chin, which melted over the high white stock. Yet, barring this exuberant fleshiness, the face was not a bad face. It had

indeed its measure of good looks, being not unlike Marmaduke's own. The bald head, if a trifle small, was well shaped, the blue eyes clear, if a trifle cold, and the lips, cruel enough in their heavy curves, had evidently done a deal of laughing in their day to judge by the lines about them. Altogether a strong, sensible face; but arrogant, intolerant to a degree, especially now when its owner was listening to the defiance of his son—a son dependent on him for every farthing beyond his miserable pay as a captain in His Majesty's forces—a son who——

For a moment Baron Drummuir looked as if he must have a fit; then he laughed—a great rude, rough guffaw.

"'Pon my soul," he chuckled, "it's as good as a play! So it's you, is it, you young fool? How the deuce did you get here at this time of day? We didn't expect you for another two hours, so I decided business first"—he waved carelessly to the fallen tree—"and pleasure—that's you, jackanapes—afterwards. Eh, what! Hey!"

This calm reception of his insults completely took the starch out of them and poor Marmaduke, who, standing on his pedestal, could think of nothing further to say save to mumble something about the short cut by the old ferry road.

The baron, as he loved to be called, chuckled again.

"Good boy—anxious as all that to see his poor old dad. And came in the nick of time to see me kill my fatted calf"—he waved to the fallen tree again. "I've killed it nicely, haven't I? And"—here a flicker of pure hatred passed across the fleshy face—"the devil take the man who made me do it!"

His father's expression re-aroused Marmaduke's anger.

"You curse yourself by saying that, sir," he burst out;

"for God knows you always do what you want—nobody makes you."

Once again the old man took the starch out of the young one.

"Smart!" he said coolly. "Demned smart, my dear boy! I wonder you don't get on better in life than you do, judging by your constant but fruitless appeals to my cash-box. But get down off your high horse, there's a good lad—you look like some damned play-acting fool up there—and give your old dad a paw; the left one, young ass, the left! Can't you see my right is all banded up with the most infernal fit of my old enemy I've had since last Christmas? All that Périgord-pie old Hare sent me. I'll baste his fat liver for him when he comes to-morrow. Lordy lord! Puts me in mind, Marmaduke, of the old days when your mother—she was the best of the three—used to say to you, a little lad, 'The right hand, my dearie. The right hand, my lovie.' And you never could remember. You were a bit of a dullard, but fine and strong and handsome. Not like that cursed skunk, Master Pitt—but there, don't let's mar the harmony of the occasion, eh, Jack?" He turned to a small man with somewhat of a weasel face who stood beside him listening devoutly, as were all the group. "You remember Jack Jardine, don't you, Duke?"

"Slightly," smiled the young man, grasping the other's hand and shaking it violently. "One of the few pleasant reminiscences, sir, I have of Drummur Castle." He echoed his father's reckless disregard of other folks' feelings with superb indifference and gave back the old man's critical look coolly.

The latter laughed.

"Just what I was at his age—eh, what? Lordy lord, Jack, how we smashed all the lamp-posts in Dodston and told the provost to send the policeman with the bill! Ha, ha! and old cat Carnegie sitting in the hearse with her skirts up to her knees going to the Hunt ball when we'd commandeered every other conveyance in the town. Ha, ha! how the pretty little lassies showed their sandalled ankles, bless 'em, trying to keep their dresses clear of coffins. But I am forgetting. Sandalled ankles reminds me—eh, Fantine? Come here, my dear. I must present you to my second son, Captain—he wants to be a major, I'm told—Marmaduke Muir. Marmaduke, make your due respects to Mdlle. Fantine Le Grand, your future stepmother!"

The dainty little figure, which till then had been standing with one tiny, much-beringed hand resting on the back of the bath-chair, its inquisitive, almost colourless grey eyes taking in the minutest detail of the scene, took a step forward and prepared to make a full-flounced curtsey. But Marmaduke was too quick, too prompt in his perceptions. He grasped the situation and the little lady in a second. The general pinkness of complexion and furbelows, the jimpness of the long trim waist, the uncompromising bands of black velvet, the showers of fair ringlets. His hat was off with a flourish, he also took a step forward to meet the curtsey, but, bending with a "grand air" that did him infinite credit, gave the powdered face a resounding kiss.

The recipient let loose a decorous shriek outwardly; within it was easy to see amused acquiescence. Once again old Lord Drummuir looked as though he would have a fit.

"You dashed young scoundrel," he spluttered.

Marmaduke held his head very high.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "if I've done wrong; but you said she—I beg pardon, Mdlle. Fantine Le Grand"—his eyes flashed into hers boldly and met a smile—"was to be my stepmamma, so I thought——"

"Oh, the devil take your thoughts," growled his father, but his lips twitched suspiciously. Then suddenly he burst out once again into one of his rude, rough guffaws. "Regular chip of the old block, hey, Jack? Well, Fan, I dare say you don't mind. Haven't too long, you know, of such gay young sparks, for as soon as I'm about again he shall dance at your wedding. Now, for heaven's sake, don't let's stop chattering here! I've got to see my daughters and I want to talk to my son. No, no, you jackanapes, keep away just now! My gout's cursed, the road is cursed, and my temper will be cursed too; so I should likely disinherit you before we got on to the lawn. Fan shall stop by me. I won't have you gallivanting with my son, d'ye hear? He's a good-looking chap, confound him, but you've got to pay for the title, my lady! Have a care, blockhead! Didn't you see that stone? Don't let it hurt your pretty little feet, Fan."

Marmaduke, dropping behind with Jack Jardine, gave a fierce sigh as he watched the little cavalcade move off amid this running fire of curses and kindliness.

"Is it all just as it used to be, Jack?" he asked helplessly.

The little man cleared his throat.

"A little worse perhaps. Your father is a very remarkable man, Marmaduke—a very remarkable man!"

CHAPTER III

ANYONE who had seen Lord Drummur ten minutes after Jack Jardine's remark must have echoed it, for a more complete *volte face* of manner, speech, and apparently temperament than that which overtook the baron in the dower house could not be imagined. Still in his bath-chair, which Marmaduke had dutifully pushed in through the French windows on to the green-grounded, cabbage-rosed drawing-room carpet, he beamed round on his daughters and their chaperon with a paternal affection which was almost pathetic. The Honourable Miss Muirs were three in number and they had all greeted their younger half-brother with reserved kisses. But then everything they did was reserved. Miss Mary, the eldest, was reserved even about her tendency to grow stout, which, all things considered, was the strongest interest in her life. Miss Elizabeth, the second, a very elegant looking woman, was equally reserved about her undoubted intellect, while Miss Margaret, a great tall, strapping figure with all her father's force of character and all his soundness of constitution, held both in check, except when she managed a lonely walk with her dogs in the woods. Then her voice would ring out deep and true, and at the crack of her whip every puppy within miles would come in contentedly to heel.

Her father liked her the least, probably because of the contrast between her and his ricketty male heir, so in the

shabby Victorian drawing-room she generally sat mum-chance, showing up badly against her sisters' exquisite manners. For no one knew better than Lord Drummuir what a gentlewoman should be, and therefore he had been extremely particular about his daughters' education. To what end, heaven alone knew, since they lived on, year after year, in the dower house, occasionally visiting in stately fashion the late minister's wife (though this distraction was no longer theirs owing to the State appointment of a bachelor to the living), and, very occasionally, seeing some of their father's older and more respectable friends. In regard to this, however, and to kindred matters no grand Turk could have been more autocratic than was Lord Drummuir. So he sat and discoursed on Shakespeare and the musical glasses, on his delight at seeing his dearest boy again, leading the latter on to detail some of the more instructive portions of his foreign life, until the full half-hour which he daily bestowed on his daughters was up. Then with the utmost punctuality he took out his watch, said he feared he must be off, and congratulated himself and the three young ladies on a charming conversation.

"You are too good, papa," replied the young ladies, as they deposited a decorous kiss on his bald head. So they stood and watched the bath-chair roll along the lawn till it reached the turn by the rhododendrons which hid it from view, and then they waved their handkerchiefs. And the baron waved his in return, thereafter using it to mop his forehead relievedly, while he ejaculated, "Thank God, that's over!"

Whereat Marmaduke smiling, the old man went on serenely.

"Never forget, my boy, how to treat women of good character. The other comes naturally, but I'm damned if I ever forgot my manners with a really good woman. And you will find it pays, Duke, it pays. So now have not you got some bit of spice, or an *on dit* to amuse the old man with? Curse me, but I lead a miserable life here, tied down by this infernal complaint; but I am paying now for the follies and indiscretions of youth. Confound you, Marmaduke, you might think of your poor old father's joints and not rush your fences in that way!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Marmaduke, meekly glad of the turn he had given the conversation by deploying the bath-chair into the gravel walk; for, in good truth, he had no great relish for spicy stories. Not that he was a prig, but that he had been born a sportsman, to whom indoor life was dull and irksome. So he welcomed another interruption in the shape of a young man who came hastily down the path to meet them.

"Why, I believe it's Peter!" he cried joyously, and the next minute was shaking hands with his young half-brother, the fruit of Lord Drummur's third but not last marriage; for his wives never lived long, except the first, who had lingered for years, only giving him useless daughters. "Why, Peter, how you've grown!" remarked Marmaduke unnecessarily, seeing he had been away ten years.

"So've you—you're a giant beside the rest of us, except Meg! Pitt and I——" The lad pulled himself up sharp. "Well, I say, sir, we must have a rousin' night to celebrate Duke's return!"

Marmaduke, looking at the slender, fair-haired youth

with a weak mouth and an excited manner, thought he had probably roused too much. Instinctively, therefore, since he had often been drunk himself—it was the fashion of the time—he changed the subject again to one that had come uppermost in the old familiar surroundings.

“I say, how about the grouse? Is it to be a good year?”

His eyes as he spoke almost yearned over a swelling purpled horizon curve which told where the best moors in that part of Aberdeenshire were to be found.

Five minutes after the old lord, still in his bath-chair, was discoursing in the most animated and amiable fashion about sport past and present and to come, while his two sons, one of them sprawling on the lawn, joined in amicably.

So amicably that Mdlle. Fantine Le Grand, watching them from her boudoir windows, turned to a man who was lounging in a chair reading the papers, and said—

“This sort of thing won’t do, Compton. That young man is too charming”

The man to whom she spoke did not look up. He went on reading, as he said—

“You don’t often find them too charming, Fan!”

“Don’t be a fool, Tom,” she replied curtly, coming to sit beside him. “You know quite well what I mean. Young men of that sort always are in debt; besides, I’ve heard the old man say something about money for a majority. Now the estate’s entailed, so payments of that sort must come out of what I mean to be mine—and I won’t have it!”

“Sound common sense, Fan,” said her companion,

yawning; "but you are always in such a hurry to begin. Wait a few days and see how the land lies first. You've always the best of weapons in your hand."

"What's that?"

"Jealousy. The old man is as jealous as old boots. Once make him fancy young Marmaduke is sweet on you, and he goes to the right-about."

Fantine sat back and laughed.

"You are always so comforting, Tom."

He rose and put down his paper.

"Always ready to help, my dear; but you remember our compact—half shares when the old man dies."

"He'll be good for another ten years if I marry him," she called after her late companion, as he strolled out of the room.

Then she sat down and faced facts. In truth she was getting tired of her rôle of *première danseuse* at a London theatre. Perhaps, she even admitted, she was a trifle too old for the agile cutting of capers. She felt vaguely that she would like to draw in her horns and let her waist out, and she was quite ready to take Lord Drummur as a means of satisfying both ambitions. In her way she was neither bad nor unkind, simply egotistic to a degree. In this last episode of an eventful career which seldom outlasts the age of forty, she had deliberately played for semi-respectability, and had only come down to stay at Drummur Castle under the wing of an impeccable *duenna*. Not that the fact had in the least imposed on the old lord. He was shrewd enough to know Miss Fanny Biggs, or, as she chose to style herself, Mdlle. Fantine Le Grand, down to the ground. But it was something to have someone to dance for him (as she did

to distraction), when he had a fit of the gout and look quite deucedly pretty at all times. So the bargain was made. A title in exchange for amusements. But Fantine Le Grand looked beyond the old man's life; she looked for comfortable widowhood. So she wandered again to the window and watched the family trio on the lawn. It was far too filial for her tastes. Tom Compton, so-called Colonel of Irregulars, one of her oldest friends, had been right. Jealousy would be a good card to play. And then she laughed suddenly at the recollection of Marmaduke's filial salute. He was better-looking than his father must have been at his age, but, according to the latter, he was "a chip of the old block." So he would be easy prey.

Meanwhile, Colonel Compton having joined the group on the lawn, the conversation had drifted round to politics, and the old lord, being an ardent Whig, had waxed fast and furious on the enormities of the Tories. A perfectly innocent subject, but one which did not interest Marmaduke, who thereupon drifted away to find Jack Jardine, from whom he hoped to hear the truth as to his father's present relations with the heir, the Master, and also—though this interested him less, since it was to a certain degree patent—with Mdlle. Le Grand. So, as they sat smoking Fubourg's tobacco out of long clay pipes after the fashion of the times, they discussed the situation.

"You ask how the breach has widened," said Jack Jardine. "Well, I don't think it has done so abnormally. It has been going on ever since poor Pitt turned out such a weakling. You know the family history. After he married Lady Helen, whom he shouldn't have married

because she too, poor soul, was, as it were, doomed to disease, though she was a duke's daughter and so satisfied his lordship's pride—a miserable story, Duke, a miserable story. Well, there was one disappointment about an heir after another, as you know, Duke, and it hit home into the peer—for he is no fool. Put it briefly, though he is quite ready to tell you he is suffering from the indiscretions of youth while he is in torments with the gout, and at the same time supping every night on broiled foxes' tongues and mulled claret, he can't bear to see the results in Pitt. He hates him because he hasn't the physique to carry on the name. He is a very remarkable man, Duke, is your father."

"Very," assented the young man grimly. "I wish the devil he wasn't."

"That's why I, and all the rest of us who have Drummuir interests at heart, are so glad you've come home. You're presumptive heir now, and to all intents and purposes you're 'apparent.' And you're straight and strong, thanks to your poor mother. So we look to you to keep up the honour of the name. I believe if you play your cards well, you might easily oust Miss Fanny Biggs, or Mdlle. Fantine——"

Marmaduke burst into a laugh.

"Thank you," he said; "that is most succinct! I needn't ask any more. But does the old man really mean to marry her?"

Jack Jardine nodded.

"Would have done it three months ago but for the gout. And she isn't really so bad, but devilish sly; and that man Compton, whom the peer has taken up with over the railway business, is in with her." He gave a

sigh and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "I've my work cut out for me, Duke, I can tell you."

There was a slight pause, and then Marmaduke said curiously—

"I've often wondered, Jack, why you, who by your brains could have made your own way, have been contented to stick on in this cursed old place among us cursed people, letting us youngsters call you Jack and borrow money from you. By the way, I shouldn't have been able to come home if you hadn't sent me that last hundred pounds."

Jack Jardine said nothing; then he walked to the window.

"You may as well know, Duke, it may help you to steer your way. It is because I, a poor lawyer, loved your mother—not before, but after she became Lady Drummur! Of course she never guessed; but I helped her to try and keep your father straight. She led an awful life——"

"You needn't tell me that!" broke in Marmaduke, fiercely.

"Yet your father didn't mean ill to her. Anyhow, I tried to help her, and so I suppose it became a habit. Love is a queer thing, Duke!"

"I believe it is," said Marmaduke, magisterially, "but it has not come my way yet," and he added joyously, "I hope it won't for some years to come, for I like enjoying myself."

Apparently he did; for as the summer evening began to close in on Drummur Castle and the menkind, with only Mdlle. Fantine and her *duenna* to represent the opposite sex, gathered in the huge dining-room to attack

a heavy dinner which would have sufficed for a regiment, he was the life and soul of the party, and ate through the *menu* with a relish which aroused regret and admiration in the old lord.

"Dash it all," he bawled, "why can't I eat soup, fish, top and bottom and four sides through five courses like that dashed youngster of mine, who puts it on to his shoulders instead of his waist like I do?"

And when the claret began to circle round faster and faster Marmaduke never let it pass; so that when, with sweet decorum, Mdlle. Fantine and her *duenna* prepared to withdraw, he nearly killed the Skye terrier in his flamboyant haste to open the door. Nay, more! He followed them into the corridor for an instant. What passed there none saw, but he returned to his seat with flushed cheeks and throbbing veins, feeling vaguely that the battle of wits had begun.

Of what followed his memory was confused. He remembered that outside the windows the summer twilight was still flooding the green lawns, while humanity inside, after guzzling itself stupid with rich food, was trying to grow witty over the boozing of mulled claret and whisky-toddy. They began, of course, with the young queen's health, and went on methodically till they came to the good old Scotch toast: "Here's to oorsels. Wha' better? Damn few!" After this, which seemed to afford general satisfaction, they proceeded to particularise, and Marmaduke had a dim recollection of someone proposing "The future Commander-in-Chief, coupled with the name of Captain Marmaduke Muir."

But whether he replied, or whether the effort to rise

and do so was too much for him and he rolled under the table, he could not say.

Certain it is that on that first night of his return to the home of his fathers Marmaduke Muir was hopelessly drunk.

Certain also that he erred in company, the only sober man being Jack Jardine, who invariably sought the shelter of the table at an early period and lay there comfortably, his head on a buffet, listening to the commiserations on his weak head until he fell asleep, to wake when the carouse was over, and see that the gentlemen's gentlemen sorted their respective masters to their respective beds.

CHAPTER IV

MARRION PAUL sat in the semi-darkness of the summer night waiting for her grandfather to return from his duties at the Castle. She did not generally do so, for he was apt to be late; but on this, the first day of Captain Duke's return, sleep would have been out of the question until she heard something of the evening. For she did not mince matters with herself; those six years of independent life in Edinburgh had opened her eyes to the world, and the first sight of Marmaduke Muir had told her that the long ten years had not changed her at all; that he was as much the sun in her heaven as he had been in the old childish days. The sun in her heaven, and something more superadded to those olden times.

Then the day had been disturbing. Everyone had come to her praising the Captain's looks and ways and general charm; to all of which she had replied coolly, feeling the while in a perfect quiver of gladness. Miss Margaret had been the hardest to damp when she had appeared in the afternoon with the sporting dogs and a stout crop in her hand on her way to take them a scramble over the rocks and round by the lower bay.

"Oh, Marrion!" she cried enthusiastically. "Saw you ever the like? Elizabeth says he's like the Apollo Belvidere!"

"I am not knowing the gentleman," protested Marrion distantly. "But Captain Duke has grown to a fine figure.

But has Miss Muir seen Andrew Fraser? He's twice the man he was when he went away."

It was a false move on Marrion's part, for it brought on her instantly the hearty reply—

"I'm glad to hear it, Marmie; so I suppose we will be having you cried in the kirk before long. Duke says he has been most faithful."

Whereupon the speaker called to her dogs in a stentorian voice worthy her father's, cracked her whip scientifically, and strode away for an hour or two's freedom. For the atmosphere of the dower house was stifling, and there was always a chance of meeting the Rev. Patrick Bryce on the sands below the rocks, where he went always to compose his sermons, with which the reverend gentleman had no little difficulty. Not because he was stupid, but because he found it laborious to reconcile his own views with those of his flock; they, however, being inclined to be lenient with one who had earned for himself the nickname of "the bonny parson," and who was known to be the best shot and fisherman in the district. For this reason he would have been welcome at the Castle, but for his unswerving outspoken protest against its general behaviour.

Marrion, meanwhile, finding more peace as the day died down, took to wandering at the far side of the quadrangle listening to the distant sounds of revelry; her hands, as she walked, busy with her knitting-pins—after the fashion of Scotchwomen in those days—going faster and faster as her thoughts grew hotter over what she knew was happening at the other side of the blank wall. Guzzling and boozing! First the masters, then the men-servants, while away in the back premises the

scullerymaids and kitchenmaids were working hard. It was a shame, a burning shame; but if ever she had a son she would see to it that he was different.

But she never would have a son; anyhow, not Andrew Fraser's, be he ever so sober, so upright. That was the worst of it. With an impatient sigh she hurried outside the keep door to stand and watch the last faintly flushed clouds of sunset in the nor'-west fade over the darkling stretches of moorland.

It must be nigh twelve of the clock, for eastwards, over the darkling stretches of the sea, a faint lightening of the horizon, which held such a hint of restlessness even in its shadow, told where the sun would soon rise again. For in those high northern latitudes there is a bare two hours' darkness in a summer night.

Twelve o' the clock, and after that would be their birthday. Well, good luck to him wherever he went! Some day he must be the laird—Baron Drummuir. Nothing to hinder that must come into his life—nothing!

The faithfulness of inherited service was in her blood. She recognised this and sometimes wondered if her own devotion to the honour and welfare of the House of Drummuir was not stronger even than her grandfather's; possibly because her father, by all repute, had been a faithful servant, too; such things are not to be escaped.

She was aroused from her thoughts by a wavering step in the quadrangle, and returned to meet her grandfather in the expansive stage of intoxication.

"Aye, my lass," he went on, when he had wept a few easy tears over her goodness in sitting up for him, "it was just a gran' nicht. The pipes seemed fey and I blawed at them till we was baith like to burst. An' my lord, he

was for havin' oot the biggest bottle o' pickled foxes' tongues, an' he devilled them himsel' in a chaffin' dish afore them all, an' they a' drunk wi' mirth an' guid claret. Jock, the butler, was tellin' me—there was twal o' them—that they were drinkin' thirty bottles o' the best, forbye sixteen tum'lers of hot whisky-toddy, the Sheriff and the Lord Provost had, honest gentlemen, to their lane—an' there wud be no 'hoot-toots' where the Shirra was concerned! Then the laird o' Balbuggo—he has a weak head, yon man, was for ridin' hame and was no to be hindered frae it; sae Captain Duke an' anither young spark jest perched his saddle to the loupin'-on-stane and pit the guid man to it. An' there he sat tittuping away his lane for an hour or sae quite blythe, till they tell't him he was at Balbuggo, and he just aff an' awa tae his bed like a lammie."

"And Captain Duke?" asked the girl, with scorn in her voice, pity in her heart, despite the irrepressible smile in her eyes. "Was he drunk, too?"

Old Davie winked solemnly.

"Aye, that was he—he was fair fou—but," he added carefully; "he took his cups real well! Not like Mr. Peter, that syne gets tae sickness and——"

"Gran'father," cried the girl passionately, interrupting him, "it's gettin' late! You must away to your bed, or you'll no be up the morn to pipe 'Hey! Johnnie Cope, are ye waukin' yet?' I'll see to the doors."

"No be up?" contended the old man. "I tell ye if the arkaungel Gabbriel was tae soun' his trump any day at half-after seven, he'd find Davie Sims—aye, and his forbears an' descendants—skirling awa' at that same tune up an' dune a' the passages in Drummuir Castle

tae wake the gentlefolk! Aye, that wad he"—here he began stumbling up the stair with his candle held at an angle of forty-five—"though it's hard on a body that's had tae pipe to the deil ower nicht to think o' his duty tae the sluggard."

Here his maunderings became unintelligible, and the girl he left turned to the closing of the house, her heart hot as fire with indignation, chill as ice with scorn.

What else was there to expect? Like father, like son! When she had drawn the bolts she went up to her own room and flung its little window wide. The full moon shone round like a shield, and by its light she could see the whole wild coast stretching northwards from Drumkirk Point to Rattray Head. And after that? The North Pole, of course! Dear inaccessible region to all but the strong, the single of heart, the men who could command others—and themselves.

She scarcely knew what it was that she raged against as slowly, methodically, she began to undress. The little brilliant or paste brooch, she knew not which, formed of two crossed p's which was the only relic she possessed of her dead father, arrested her for a second. What sort of a man had he been really, she wondered, and what sort of a son would hers be when she had one?

She flung the tiny bauble from her impatiently, so stood for a second drawn up to her full height, her bare arms crossed, her shapely hands clasping their smooth roundness; then, with a sudden sob, she realised what had come to her, and, throwing herself face downwards on her bed, lay for a minute or two still as the dead. Then as suddenly she sat up again with a world of puzzled wonder in her strained eyes.

"I canna think," she murmured, "what gars' me love him so, but I do, and there's an end o' it."

Possibly; but such knowledge as that which had just burst over her like a storm does not make for quiet sleep. She told herself a thousand and one wise things, but the hours slipped by, bringing at last a conviction of hopelessness. She would be better up than pretending to rest, so she went to stand at the window once more.

The flush of coming day was clear now in the northeast, the flood-tide of the full moon lay mysterious in the embrace of the rocks. Ere long the rising sun would send battalions on battalions of shining golden ripples to storm the estuary and climb the shadowy cliff on which the castle stood—where he lay drunk!

Ah, well! That would not spoil the beauty of it all, which she had so often seen, and the nip of the salt North Sea might check her silly desire for him. The room felt stifling; she would be better outside.

So, slipping on her swimming-dress of coarse white flannel blanketing (for ever since those childish days when she and Duke had done everything in common she had been an expert swimmer), she threw a plaid round her, and made her way through the keep gateway to the rocks below. There was no breeze, the tide must be at its height almost, and there was the spent moon, pale with its long night-watch, hanging on the grey sky of dawn. Ah, these were the things worth having—the others could be set aside with joy!

Ere five minutes were over, breathless from her fierce driving strokes through the water, she had turned over on her back, and, face to the skies, was trying to imagine she was floating thitherwards. The gulls, wakened by

the coming light, skimmed over her in their quest for food. The little pointed wavelets that rose and fell, marking the course of the river stream, made a fine, sobbing, tinkling noise in her ears.

Full flood-tide!

She laughed aloud in the joy of it; then, rolling over again, struck out for the opposite shore. Higher up the estuary there was a little sheltered bay whence she could watch the panorama of dawn. When she drew herself out of the water on to a convenient rock the air struck warm, and the stone beneath her had scarce lost yester-sun's heat. It would be a perfect day—if anything over hot, for a faint opalescence already lay on sea and sky.

As she sat waiting for the first rays of the sun to "skim the sea with flying feet of gold," she unplaited her russet hair, which had become loosened, and, combing out its long length with her fingers, prepared to plait it up again.

Suddenly a voice startled her.

"A beauteous mermaid, by Jove! Fair lady——"

The theatrical intonation did not deceive her. She slipped like any seal into the water, and so protected looked back to see Marmaduke Muir. He was still in his over-night's dress-clothes, but their utter disarray made them more consonant with his occupation, for he held a salmon-rod in his hand, a creel had unfastened his ruffled shirt at the neck, and he had evidently torn off his stiff stock for more ease, and kicked away his pumps for firmer foothold on the rocks. His face showed no sign of last night's carouse, and Marrion, looking at it, could not but confess that some sins leave no mark on a

man. Ere she could utter a word, his surprise found speech.

"Why, Marmie!" Then in a half-awed tone he added: "What beautiful hair you've got, my dear!"

"Aye," she replied imperturbably, feigning perfect calm, "it's fine! Folk is aye tellin' me o' 't. The hair-dresser in Edinbro' was offering me a lot for it."

He sat down on the rocks above where she lay swaying with the long roll of the distant waves outside the bar, her hands holding to the seaweed.

"Goth and Vandal! But you didn't let him have it. Wise Marmie, but then you always were wisdom itself! I remember——"

He was becoming vaguely sentimental, so she brought him back to earth with a round turn.

"You'll no have been gettin' any fish the morn?" she queried.

"No fish!" he echoed loftily. "What do you call that?"

He pulled out of his creel a seven-inch burnie and laid it with pomp on the rocks. Then their young laughter echoed out into the dawn.

"But I got a hold on another," he went on, keen as a boy. "A real good one—as big as any I ever got in the castle pool—perhaps bigger. You see they were talking of the fishing yesterday and they all said it was no good. Not enough water. So I didn't intend to try; but—well, you see, my dear, I got drunk last night—I did—and I woke up about half an hour ago with a beastly headache. So then I thought I'd go out and see if the fish weren't moving, and as they'd put me to bed in my clothes—I must have been horrid drunk, and Andrew, you see, was

away with his people—I just took one of Peter’s rods and ferried myself over in the boat. It’s up yonder. I’ll take you back in it, if you like.”

The idea was preposterous. Marrion imagined herself arriving at the castle, where the servants were ever early astir, in her bathing dress with the Captain! So she hastily drew a red herring across the trail.

“And was the fish real big, Captain Duke?” she asked.

“Big! I tell you it was the biggest I, or, for the matter of that, anyone else ever caught in the castle pool.”

“Fish are aye big when they are in the water, I’m thinking,” she cast back at him, as, loosing her seaweed hold, she struck out.

He sprang up.

“You’re not going to try and cross now!” he cried, pointing to where in mid-stream a wide oily streak told that tide and river were flowing out fast. “The ebb is at its strongest. Marmie, don’t be a fool!”

She gave a quick glance forward, then looked back to smile farewell.

“Aye, it’s strong, but I’ve done it before now. There’s no fear for me, Captain Duke.”

So saying she turned her head upstream, seeing indeed that she would have to be careful not to be swept past her bearings when she got to mid-channel; so she did not see Marmaduke tear off his creel, his coat, and waistcoat, and, in thin ruffled shirt and kersey breeches, launch himself into the water. But his tremendous underwater strokes soon brought him up almost beside her to shake his curly head like a retriever. She looked at him startled and quickened her strokes, whereupon he changed to overhand and ranged up beside her without effort.

"Where did you learn yon?" she asked, more for something to break a silence which made her heart beat than from curiosity. "You usen't to swim that way."

"In the Indies," he replied, laughing. "I must teach it to you; but it isn't much good in currents. By Jove, how jolly this is. Why the deuce did I take the boat? I say—look out! I feel the trend of the stream."

Small doubt of that. They were through the back-water and in another minute would be in the full of outgoing river and outgoing tide. The opposite bank seemed slipping past them rapidly. Duke changed his stroke instantly and ranged up beside Marrion.

"It will be easier together," he said, passing his hand over her shoulder, and obediently she passed hers over his.

"Now then, together!" he cried. "And if you tire you know what to do; and keep time, there's a good girl."

So they struck off, the forward lunge of his long legs aiding hers, that were so far behind in strength. Thus they battled the stream shoulder to shoulder, almost cheek to cheek, her long loose hair sweeping across him, until the worst of it was over and the girl would fain have loosed her grip and turned shorewards definitely.

"Not yet!" he laughed. "Let's swim out to sea a bit! Look— isn't it worth it?"

Aye, worth everything else in the world. Far out in the east over that restless horizon the first ray of the sun had tipped, sending a widening, radiant path of pure gold to meet them. It shone on her red-brown hair, turning it to bronze; it shone in their blue eyes, turning them to sapphires; and it shone on their wholesome, happy faces, transfiguring them out of all semblance to

beings of dingy earth and purifying them from all mortal taint. They were freed souls swimming in the vasty ether, all around them the dawn of a new day.

So they went on and on, till suddenly Duke veered their course shorewards with one guiding stroke.

"I shall tire you out," he said softly, and his freed hand, as he disentangled her hair from his neck, lifted the shiny strands to his lips for a second. "You have got such jolly hair, Marmie! I wonder you don't wear it down your back. None of the fellows could resist you then."

Their faces were away from the dawn now and hers already had a cloud on it.

"I'm going to the big rock. I left my shawl there," she said, directing her course towards it.

Duke followed suit in silence. Suddenly he said—

"I can't think how I was such a fool as to get drunk last night. It shan't occur again; but, you know, I shouldn't have had this perfectly stunning time if I hadn't, should I? We must repeat it every morning, Marmie, mustn't we?"

"Weather permitting," she replied, almost bitterly. "But it's no often sae comfortable to be in the water as it is this morning, Mr. Duke."

"Ah, you should have been with me in the Indies! You could stop in all day. You're not feeling cold, I hope?"

Cold! With every pulse in her body clamouring for sheer joy in his presence.

"I'll no be cold when I get my shawl," she said calmly; then, seeing him turn, called quickly—

"You're no going across again, Mr. Duke, it isn't safe!"

"Didn't I tell you so from the beginning, eh? No; of course I'm not. I'm going to swim up the side to the steps and send the ghillie for the boat."

She watched the rhythmic spluttering of his overhand stroke past the point. He would be home before her, she thought, as somewhat wearily she climbed the rocks to the keep. It had been a real joy. In all her life, long or short, she would never forget it.

That was the pity of it, for the memory might become a pain.

CHAPTER V

MARMADUKE MUIR'S repentances, like many of his virtues and vices, were apt to be evanescent. So the next week, it is to be feared, saw many a lapse from his intention that drunkenness should not occur again. In truth it needed a strong will to be sober in Drummuir Castle. The old lord himself had a head which nothing could upset, and though he went to his bed groaning with gout, no one could have said his wits were in the least astray. Now Marmaduke had to a certain extent inherited this toleration of alcohol, a fact which at once gratified his father and set the old sinner to the graceless task of inciting his son to more and more glasses of good claret, champagne, and port in order to see how far the inheritance went. And Marmaduke, partly because he was anxious to ingratiate himself with his irascible parent and partly from sheer *joie de vivre*, fell in with the old man's whim. In reality it meant much to him that he should get to the right side of his father. He had a chance of his majority if only fifteen hundred pounds odd could be found over and above the regulation purchase money. It was a big price; but the vacancy was in a crack Highland regiment and the majority would give him almost the certainty of commanding in the future.

"The peer has never done anything for me in his life," he said angrily to Jack Jardine. "I've gone into a West India regiment. I've lived on my pay—and your allow-

ance, old chap. By the way, I do wish you'd make up accounts between us. We three brothers must owe you a lot already, and though we've all given our *post obits* on the property when the old man dies, I myself don't like it. Worries me when I have a headache, you know!"

Jack Jardine smiled. The proposition for a clear account had been made many times in the past ten years, sometimes by one brother, sometimes by another—but generally by Marmaduke—without in any way altering the relative positions of creditor and debtor. So he set the point aside.

"Why should you have a headache, Duke?" he began as a prelude to a sermon on sobriety he had been meditating for some days; but Marmaduke's candour took the words out of his mouth.

"Not the least reason in life, Jack, except that I want and will have my majority, and I *must* keep straight with the peer till I get the money. Look here, I'll tackle the old man to-morrow, and if I succeed I'll cut and run. I don't drink anywhere else, Jack, I don't indeed—not, I mean to say, *drink*."

Looking at the speaker's clear, almost boyish, face his hearer could well believe it.

"Your father is suffering a lot from the gout just now," he said, dubiously.

"And he'll go on suffering as long as I'm here, and he wants to make me drunk," retorted Marmaduke, whose perceptions were by no means dense, "so the sooner it's over the better for both of us!"

Accordingly the very next day when, in accordance with his usual custom, he wheeled his parent to the paternal visit to the dower house, Marmaduke broached

the subject of finance on the way back. It was not a very auspicious moment, for the old gentleman had been made at once irritable and pious by an unwary allusion on the part of his youngest daughter, Margaret, to the new minister of the parish, the Reverend Patrick Bryce. Now the reverend gentleman in question was at the time Lord Drummuir's *bête noire*. To begin with, he had been presented to the living by the Crown, and the Barons of Drummuir had for generations claimed the right themselves. Evil thinking people, indeed, said that it was this fact which made the old man so whole-hearted an advocate of that disruption in the Church of Scotland which was then rending the country in twain. People talked of little else, except railways, and on that point Lord Drummuir held the most conservative of views. They would, he said, not without truth, play the devil with country society and make it impossible for a nobleman to travel in comfort. But no one who knew his lordship ever asked for consistency in his opinions. He simply held them with a tenacity that was perfectly appalling. So the mere mention of the Reverend Patrick Bryce's name, with the addition of a fine blush on his daughter's face when she discovered her slip of the tongue, had put him into a white heat of politeness and piety.

"I am surprised at you, Margaret," he said. "I should prefer your having nothing to do even with the school feasts of a man who, denying the headship of the church to the Almighty, continues to batten on the loaves and fishes of—of—and has the cursed impudence to find fault with other people's meat and drink, too," he added, fiercely.

Despite this, Marmaduke, who had inherited no little of his father's obstinacy, took the opportunity of the bath-chair reaching the finest point of the view to say with a great show of courage—

"By the way, sir, don't you think it's about time to send that money for my majority? Pringle is rather in a hurry to retire, and the price may run up if we don't act soon."

His lordship rather admired this home thrust without warning, but he was on his guard at once and cleared his throat for a speech.

"It's a positive disgrace to our army, and so I told poor Brougham the last time I saw him, that promotion should not only go by purchase but that private individuals should have power to fill their pockets with the proceeds of further extortion. It is a kind of simony; it is the sale of valour, of one's country's good!"

Lord Drummur was a noted orator when he chose, even in those days when everyone could string words together into high-sounding phrases, and when Edmund Burke's foaming fulminations were held up to the young as models of eloquence; but Marmaduke was obdurate.

"Possibly, sir," he interrupted, "but I want to do it. You see, sir," he warmed with his subject, "I'll be dashed if I've troubled you much in the last ten years—now have I? You've made me an allowance on which I couldn't live in a gentlemanly way at home. So I've exchanged again and again for foreign service, going down and down till I've landed in the West Indies. And now I have this chance of getting back to my old regiment, to a soldier's life that is worth having——"

"No soldier's life is worth having. If you will be kind

enough to remember, I objected from the first to the army," interrupted the old man, with icy politeness.

Marmaduke groaned aloud.

"Oh, don't let us go back so far as that, sir. The thing's done, and practically you have to decide now whether you're going to wreck my fortune or make it."

Lord Drummuir took out his pocket-handkerchief solemnly.

"And this is what I am asked to do, when my physicians insist on absolute rest of body and mind. I am asked to consider, to take all the responsibility. No, Marmaduke, you are old enough to decide for yourself!"

"Then you wish me to go back to that miserable hole?" began the young man vehemently.

"I am informed on the best authority that the climate of the West Indies has sensibly improved of late years," remarked his lordship, imperturbably. "The discovery of the cinchona plant——"

"Damn the cinchona plant!" burst out Marmaduke. But at that instant a silvery artificial little laugh rose behind them and Mdlle. Fantine Le Grand appeared tripping over the grass with the daintiest of sandalled feet.

She had again been watching father and son from her window, and after a week's hesitation she had suddenly decided that something must be done to stop what seemed to be growing confidence. She had hitherto played with the plan of arousing the old man's jealousy, confining herself to half-hearted flirtations with Marmaduke, who, also on the watch, had fallen in with the amusement quite pleasantly. But that morning Colonel Compton had spoken out his fears.

"You'll have to look to your p's and q's, Fan, or that youngster will be running away with some of the peer's loose cash. And as the estate is strictly entailed that won't suit us. I overheard that weasel, Jack Jardine, talking to the captain about the purchase of his majority, so you had better look sharp."

The words echoed in her brain as she had stood watching father and son in an apparently amicable conversation which clinched her decision. The result being her appearance before the two conspirators, provocative to the very tilt of her carefully held pink parasol.

"Oh, pardon," she began, in the stage French accent she affected in society, "but I mean not to disturb! Only the filial picture of milor and his too charming son was irresistible to poor me—so *sans famille*."

She did not look in the least forlorn, and Lord Drummuir's clear, wicked old eyes, that had seen to the bottom of so many evil things, took her in from head to foot, and his clear wicked old brain considered what she would be at. Then he chuckled softly, thinking he had found out.

"No apologies needed, dear little Fan," he said affectionately; "you are almost one of the family already, so we've no secrets. Marmaduke and I were just discussing the purchase of his majority. It will take more than two thousand five hundred pounds, I'm afraid, won't it, dear boy?—what with the regulation and non-regulation figures. A big sum, my dear, a big sum. It will make a hole in what's available for wedding presents, eh, little woman?"

He looked at her with amused malevolence, thinking he had settled her hash; for little Fan was not the woman

to flirt with a man who was to do her out of a farthing. And Fantine's eyes were steel as she made a little curtsy.

"Who, my lord," she warbled tenderly, "could regret money spent in such a good cause? Pardon," she added, remembering her accent, "was that not right said? I mean that Marmaduke"—her voice cooed the name—"is welcome to all zat I could give to him."

The baron burst into a huge rough guffaw.

"Come, that is a real good 'un!" he cried, highly amused. "I declare you're as good as a play. But it's not settled yet." Here he glanced at his son, keen to tantalise him too, and with reckless devilry sowing the seeds of evil broadcast. "I shall have to choose between diamonds for my wife and promotion for my son. Meanwhile, my lady, don't get your pretty little feet damp on the grass. Remember you have to dance to us to-night. Ogilvie and all the good fellows for miles round are coming to see you, and you mustn't be a failure."

When the bath-chair and its wheezy occupant had been handed over to the valet, Fantine Le Grand and Marmaduke lingered on the steps together in silence.

"You have not yet seen me dance?" she said, suddenly. "Well, you shall see me this evening! I will dance for you alone, monsieur."

His eyes laughed into hers boldly.

"It is a bargain, mademoiselle; but I shall ask for more, I warn you."

"*Dieu merci*," she said, with a tiny shrug of her shoulders, "you must not ask too much!"

So with provocative laughter she fled up the steps with the prettiest of little glissades and disappeared, leaving Marmaduke gratified at the impression he had evidently

made, and with a certain new admiration for the demure daintiness of Mademoiselle Fantine. His father, devil take him, hadn't a bad taste.

He said nothing of all this, however, to Jack Jardine when he raged for a full hour over his father's absolute lack of human sympathy.

"Why only yesterday," he stormed, "he signed a cheque for one thousand pounds because he wanted to pose as the patron of these dispossessed parsons. It isn't moral, it isn't Christian. He doesn't care if he ruins me body and soul. Anyhow, I've done with him for ever."

"Then you will leave at once?" suggested Jack Jardine.

In truth he was anxious to get the young man away from temptation as soon as possible, and he knew well that in the end he himself would have somehow or another to negotiate the money for the majority.

"No," replied Marmaduke. "I'm going to stop on for a bit."

And he set his nether lip hard. He was not going to give a cheek to the enemy. He meant to hit back if he could. If his father couldn't spare two thousand pounds because he wanted to spend it on a dancing woman, he might find himself in the position of not having the dancing woman on whom to spend it. He, Marmaduke, would have a try at it, anyhow. It was mean and horrible, of course, but so was the old man. He began it.

Peter Muir, coming in yawning, exclaimed at his brother's face.

"What's up, Duke?" he asked. "You look in the devil of a temper."

"So I am," retorted Duke. "And so would you be

if you had the spunk to ask anything of the baron. But you haven't, you see."

"Phew!" said Peter. "So you've been attacking the money bags. I could have told you it was no go. That's why I learnt picquet of that Italian count the governor got hold of last year and sent about his business when he had rooked him of a thou! Now I can get a guinea or two off everybody who comes in to the house—except you, Jack. You never will play."

"I don't wish to add to your pocket-money, Peter; you've too much already," replied Jack Jardine sternly. "Ah, I've heard of your beguiling that wretched girl!"

"Not for the first time, old man," put in Peter. "You shouldn't talk about things you don't understand; and a fellow must have some amusement in this cursed hole, especially when the river is low. But for the life of me, Duke, I can't see why you shouldn't go on half pay and stop at home a bit. We should have some fine fun together, and I'd teach you picquet, if you like."

Marmaduke stood gazing at his young brother for a second or two angrily. Then his face softened, he went over to him and laid his hands on his shoulders, and so remained looking down on the weak effeminate face.

"You're talking what they call 'bosh' at school, Peter. You're not a bit content here. How could you be? Give it up and come along with me when I go. The old man doesn't deserve to have a son."

Peter wriggled himself away from his brother's hold.

"I don't really see why you should go."

"Don't you? Well, I'll tell you. Because I'm a soldier born and bred. I don't suppose I shall die on the field of glory, but I shall have a try at it. And I mean

to have my majority in my old regiment if I have to forge the old man's name to get it."

With that he gloomed away and loafed about, irritated at all things and everything, even at the preparations that were being made for the festivities of the evening, for these necessitated his being turned out of his comfortable room in order to accommodate some of the guests.

"Where are they putting me?" he asked angrily of Andrew Fraser, whom he found, very long and lank in consequence of repeated attacks of malarial fever, busy packing up his dressing things.

"It will be tae whatten they used to ca' the 'Agāpe-moan' in the old lord's young days, sir," replied Andrew. "Jest yon big room wi' the outside stair in the west wing close to the keep, sir. 'Tis a bonny eneuch room with a fire to it, an' Marrion Paul has ben reddin' it up a' day."

Marrion Paul! The name came as a relief and a regret, for he had not seen her—not anyhow for speech—since their dawn-tide swim together. Now the mere memory of it in its coolness and freshness and beauty calmed his irritation, and half aimlessly he strolled across the quadrangle to inspect his new quarters. She might be there still. Apparently she was, for a sound of determined sweeping came down the stairway.

"Hullo, Marmie, is that you?" he cried joyously, bounding up the steps two at a time.

"Aye, Mr. Duke, it's me," replied the figure with the broom laconically.

Certainly it was a nice comfortable room with the fire blazing and the casement window, still somewhat hung with cobwebs, set wide to the summer sunshine. Marm-

duke passed to it and looked out. Beneath him, far down the slanting red cliffs dotted here and there with sombre pines, lay the castle pool, and over yonder to the right were the rocks on the other side where he had found Marmie combing her hair like any mermaid. It was hidden now under a most unbecoming dust kerchief; still the memory was pleasant.

"I say, Marmie," he remarked, "that swim of ours was stunning, wasn't it?"

"It's aye nice in the dawning," replied Marrion comfortably. "I've been out twice since then, and I'm no saying which I enjoyed the maist."

Marmaduke made a wry face.

"You look as if I were interrupting your work," he said tenderly.

"So you are, Captain Duke," she assented calmly.

He clapped his hands to his ears in mock alarm, and with a laugh raced headlong downstairs, calling back half-way that 'Andry' would have his work cut out for him getting his master to bed if so be the latter had had a glass too much.

When he had gone Marrion ceased sweeping and rested her cheek on the broom handle for a bit.

He—there was but one he in her life and she faced the fact quietly—did not look so well as he did at first, but of that Andrew Fraser had warned her. He had, in fact, told her of many things which otherwise she would not have known, for she had seen much of him in the last week. The racket of the noisy servants' hall, the whole dissolute life of masters and men up at the castle had not been to his taste, and he had taken to going over to the keep-house for quiet, if not for peace. But even

that was coming to him by degrees as he realised the utter hopelessness of his love for Marrion. But he realised also that if she was not for him neither was she for any other man—except one; and that was impossible. So, indeed, he had told her plainly but a day or two before, when half-dazed with fever and ague which had attacked him suddenly, in the keep-house.

She had insisted on his lying down in her grandfather's room, and when she went in to bring him a cup of hot tea he had slipped his feet to the ground apologetically, and sitting up, a lank figure among the blankets, his small pathetic eyes full of fever, had laid a hot hand on hers and said—

“I'll no be troubling you again, Marrion. I canna help loving you and you canna help loving him. It's no oorsels, ye see. It's just Providence; sae we must just both thole it.”

She had stood silent, startled by the sudden attack for a second; then she had said gravely —

“Aye, Andry, we must just thole it.”

Since then a strange confidence as to Marmaduke's sayings and doings had sprung up between the two, and even at dinner-time that very day he had told of his master's irritability.

“Things have gone ajee,” he remarked, “an' I'm thinkin' it's the money for the majority. But what's filthy lucre to health?—and sure as death the captain is no what he was. Gin' it wad make him quit yon bad auld man an' the whore-woman he is takin' to wife, I'd be heart glad.”

For Andrew Fraser, being acquainted with his Bible, did not mince words. Neither did Marrion; but having

more wits than Andrew she appraised the evils more reasonably, yet with more prejudice. Lord Drummuir was Lord Drummuir, and therefore in a way must be accepted ; but the woman was different.

Marrion Paul's eyebrows levelled themselves to a straight bar as she went on with her work.

sandalled feet was pure joy to him. And now the rhythm grew faster and faster; she was like a mad butterfly drunk with honey from the waiting flowers.

The desire of the eyes does not take long to flame up and flare, and Marmaduke felt quite dizzy as he joined in the burst of applause when, with a final pirouette, the *danseuse* kissed her hand to the audience. Or was it to him?

"Never saw La Fantine dance better, Drum," remarked a thin old man, a relic of the past youth when he and the bridegroom expectant had roystered about together, "except, perhaps, that time, you remember, when she danced the *fandango* with that South American fellow she——"

He paused, remembering that this incident in Mdlle. Le Grand's career had best not be mentioned under present circumstances.

"The *fandango*?" put in Marmaduke, afire. "I should like to see her dance that. It's the finest dance in the world. I learnt it in Cuba."

"Hullo, Drum," said the old buck, "here's a chance! Your son says he can dance the *fandango*. Here's a chance. Let's have it. They'd make a handsome couple."

Marmaduke blushed up to the ears; why, he knew not. Then he said stiffly—

"I'd rather not, Sir John."

The refusal was opportune for the *fandango*; it roused the old man's arrogance.

"Why not, sir?" he asked angrily. "You'd never get a better partner. Here, Fantine, my dear," he added, raising his voice, "this oaf of a boy of mine says he can

as the curtains drew up slowly on a background of pale pink velvet hanging in loose folds to a pale pink velvet floor. And the musty fustiness had gone! That was attar of roses, pale pink roses like the pale pink *mise-en-scène*. And hark, the thread of sound changed to two! It became rhythmic, louder! A guitar? No; it must be a Hungarian zither. Marmaduke, thoroughly roused, thrilled through to the marrow of his bones as he waited. Bent on conquest, he had dressed with the greatest care; from head to foot he was perfection. Expectant as he was, he was yet prepared to be critical; but one glance at the figure which, after peeping with roguish face between the velvet folds, stole out on tiptoe to the very footlights, then stood, finger on lip, as if imploring silence for an escapade, told him he was in the presence of a past mistress in her art, and he sat back prepared for enjoyment.

And La Fantine, as she had been called, had brought pleasure to many men. She was looking her best, dainty to a degree. The footlights, with the larger possibilities of powder and paint, had restored her youth, and her dress was entrancing. Short clouds of pale pink tulle scarcely veiled with gossamer black lace, all set and sparkling with dewdrops of paste diamonds. How they glittered and disappeared, twinkling one moment like stars amid the diaphanous black lace wings she wore on her head, then sinking to shadow again as she moved.

And heavens, how she moved! The zither thrilled louder and Marmaduke sat entranced, for their eyes had met and he realised that she was keeping her promise—she was dancing for him, for him alone. Like most young and vital creatures dancing was sheer delight to him, and the very precision of the black lace-shod,

sandalled feet was pure joy to him. And now the rhythm grew faster and faster; she was like a mad butterfly drunk with honey from the waiting flowers.

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dance the *fandango*! Show him he can't, there's a good girl!"

"I will do my leetle best, milor," she replied, with a maliciously provocative smile that would have incited anyone of spirit to action.

"I am at mademoiselle's command for tuition," said Marmaduke, with a fine bow.

His head was ringing, his pulses bounding. He was divided between anger and delight, between a desire to teach the little devil and his father a lesson, and keen pleasure at the thought of the coming dance.

A minute after he stood making his bow beside La Fantine.

"Do you really know it?" she had whispered.

"Better than you do," he had whispered back brutally. "I've danced it in the pot-houses of Habana."

Then it would be a trial of skill between them! She nodded to the zither player to begin, striking the strings with loud full-blooded notes that vibrated and thrilled through the little theatre and came back to aid the growing clamour of the music. It was grace and grace, suppleness and suppleness at first; then by degrees something fiercely beautiful, profoundly, almost overwhelmingly, appealing to the senses. The audience sat spell-bound, while to those two there grew an absorbing forgetfulness of all save that they two, man and woman, were playing each with the other. Suddenly, when that reckless forgetfulness seemed to have reached its climax, the woman faltered for a second, turned to her companion.

"Don't you know the rest?" he whispered softly. "Come on, I'll teach it you."

Half-hypnotised by his look, his manner, she followed his lead. The music, bewildered, ignorant, failed, came to a full stop. But it was not needed. Those two danced to the music of the spheres. The coarse sensuality of this earth had passed. This was the refined super-sensuality of a world of art, of sentiment. It was self-renunciation divorced from its real meaning, and when finally, with La Fantine's heart pressed to his, he laid his burning lips to hers, a great silence like a sigh came to the whole audience. It was broken by Lord Drummuir's stentorian voice—

"You—you d——d young scoundrel! This is too much——"

Marmaduke looked up jubilant.

"It's in the original dance, isn't it, Mademoiselle Le Grand?"

"I—I believe it is," she faltered uncertainly. She had met with her match, and that she knew.

"A most remarkable performance," said Sir John, with unction. "I'll tell you what it is, young man. You two would be the talk of London if you could persuade Mdlle. Fantine——" he paused again, coughed, and added precipitately, "Really, my dear Drum, you are to be congratulated on such a son, and such a future wife! Inimitable, quite inimitable! You'll never feel the least dull in the long winter evenings. Ah, Mdlle. Fantine, *mes compliments!* I have not seen you for years; not since——" here once more he pulled himself up short, and Lord Drummuir, beguiled from wrath by his ever-ready sense of humour, burst in a loud guffaw.

"Look here, Johnnie," he cried, "hold your tongue and

don't splay that old foot of yours about any more. Winter evenings be dashed ! Marmaduke is going back to his Cuban partners, and little Fanny here is going to make my gruel, aren't you, Fan ? Meanwhile, let's come and have some supper."

So they supped outrageously, and the noise of their laughter echoed out over the quadrangle, where Marrion Paul sat at her door listening for Marmaduke's step. She had promised to call Andrew Fraser the moment she heard it ; Andrew, who for two hours had been shivering and shaking with ague under the spare-room blankets, and had now apparently fallen asleep, secure in Marrion's promise to rouse him on his master's appearance.

She had been up twice to see that the captain's room was in order, and like any valet had laid out everything that would be required for the night. So, leaving the candles alight, she had come down to stand at the door of the keep-house again and watch the slow whirling stars almost stupidly, and wonder what had best be done at once to keep Duke friends with his father, and at the same time to get him away from the godless crew up at the castle.

A staggering step and Marmaduke's voice joyously thick saying—

"All right, James, you needn't come any further. I can find my way now. Good-night. Andrew—where the deuce are you, Andrew ? Why weren't you waiting ?" sent her in haste to fulfil her promise. But the hot fit had this time had a firmer grip on Andrew than either she or he had expected, and she found him lying with closed eyes half-unconscious. And though he roused at her touch it was only to mutter : "Let me be, mother !

I'm no goin' to the schule the day. I wunna ; let me be, I say !"

Marrion, seeing he was useless, laid a wet cloth on his head and returned to her station by the door. It was a dark night and she could see nothing. Neither could she hear anything.

What had happened ? Had Marmaduke managed the stairs by himself ? If so, well and good. He could be left to his own devices, and serve him very well right ! The candles were in a safe place. But if he had fallen by the way, he would be out all night. Serve him right also ! Her lips curled with scorn, and she was about to go in and close the door when she remembered that the kitchen girls shaking their mats in the quadrangle in the early morning would see him if he were lying there. If it were men it would not have mattered, but that girls should see and snigger was unbearable. She must go and make sure this would not happen. Taking the lantern—for it was pitch dark—she made her way to the foot of the stair. He was lying with his head on the lowest step, as he had fallen, sleeping peacefully. The cool night air had completed the work of wine, and so doubtless he would sleep for hours. But he must not ; that disgrace must be avoided. Kneeling beside him she shook him violently by the shoulder ; he roused a little, but not much, and as he sank back to renewed slumber she looked helpless for a moment, then angry. It was too bad ! He must be roused somehow. She lifted her hand and gave him a good smart blow on the cheek.

The effect was magical.

"Marmie," he murmured dazedly, then sat up and said confusedly, "What is it, my dear ?"

"You've got to get up and go to your bed, Mr. Duke," she replied. "Come, be quick about it."

He stumbled to his feet obediently.

"Certainly, certainly! No objection whatever," he said thickly; but when by the light of the lantern he saw the stairs he gave a silly laugh, and said amiably: "Quite impossible, I 'sure you. Where's Andrew?"

"Andrew is not here, Mr. Duke," she replied firmly. "I'll help you up. Hold on to the rail with your right hand; I'll see to you."

He delivered himself into her strong grip, body and soul, and so, with a few stumbles, they reached the top of the stairs. Here she hesitated a moment, then led him on.

"Sit you down on your bed, Duke. I'll help you off with your coat. Ye'll sleep better without it. An' now kick off yer pumps," she went on calmly, a sort of fierce motherhood possessing her, "an' I'd better loosen yer stock; 'tis tight enough to suffocate ye."

He acquiesced in all, sinking to sleep without a word almost before she had finished her ministrations. Then, taking a plaid that hung over a chair, she covered him over and prepared to go. But regret, anger, outraged affection were too strong for her. She flung herself on her knees beside the bed and buried her face on his unconscious breast.

"Ah, Duke, Duke," she moaned, "how can ye! Ah, Duke, Duke, you mustn't, you shall not spoil your life—you shall not, you shall not!"

After a time calm came to her, and, drawing a chair to the side of the bed, she sat down on it and, clasping her hands tight together, forced herself to think of the

future. But again and again she caught herself comparing those two unconscious faces—Andrew's all flushed with fever, Duke's all flushed with wine. Yet comparisons were useless before Fate. She stood up at last, crossed the room, blew out the candles, shut the door, and went downstairs, certain but of one thing, that somehow she was bound by the very greatness of her love to stand between Duke and danger.

Her grandfather was home, and snoring. Andrew she found better and beginning to fret over his inability to serve his master.

"Dinna fash yersel," she said kindly. "I heard James bring him over a while back, and he'll have seen to him."

So, absolutely outwearied, she went to her bed, to sleep at once and dream that Duke had thanked her and gone away from the godless household never to return. But Duke, meanwhile, was dreaming about wonderful white arms that had left powder on his coat and wonderful red lips that he had kissed boldly, defying the world.

CHAPTER VII

IT was not only Marrion Paul whose night had been disturbed. Lord Drummur, brought thereto by many days' indiscretions, Périgord pie at supper, and perchance his hot though transient anger at the finale to the *tandango*, fell a victim to the sharpest attack of gout he had had since Christmas and kept his side of the house awake with his curses on things in general, and his valet in particular.

And, on the other side of the south wing, Fantine Le Grand, *alias* Fanny Biggs, sat till dawn, staring at herself in the looking-glass and ciphering out the effect of something, new yet old, which had unexpectedly come into her life. She had sent her maid to bed, but felt no inclination for her own, until the disturbing element had been thoroughly reckoned with; for she was eminently practical and shrewd.

So she sat, her elbows on the dressing-table, her fingers cramped in her loosened hair, taking stock of the pretty painted face which had been the loadstar of her life. It was beginning to show age. She had admitted that to herself for some time past, and had told herself it was time for her to draw in her horns. But now had come this disturbing factor. Only that morning she had remorselessly plotted to turn Marmaduke out of the house by fair means or foul. Now she was clear-sighted

enough to admit that she would much rather keep him beside her.

Strange that one dance, one delicious abandonment of herself to his directions should have revived her youth—made her think of the gouty old man with positive loathing.

“You are a fool,” she murmured to her reflection in the glass; but the reflection answered back—“It is your last chance. Why miss it?”

She thought and thought, only one thing coming to her with certainty. To play with Marmaduke, as she had proposed to do, would be to play with fire. Was she prepared for this?

At last, wearied out, she rose, poured out a double dose of sleeping drops, and put off further considerations for the morning, since no matter at what decision she arrived, she could not afford to be haggard. She woke, late as usual, to feel, with the usual buoyancy of perfect health and practically no conscience, that she had been making a mountain out of a molehill; but the first glance at the breakfast-table laid in her little boudoir sent a thrill through her which reminded her that there were indeed pitfalls ahead. For on it lay a huge bunch of red, red roses, tied together somewhat clumsily with a red silk officer's scarf, and in it was tucked away a boyish note: “Excuse tie, I hadn't any other ribbon. Hope you aren't tired after our wonderful dance. My love to you.”

So it was real, tangible; and something must be settled one way or the other. She frowned over her breakfast and then, untying the bouquet, disposed the roses about the room, since Lord Drummur, of whose illness she had

not yet heard, might come in at any moment. The tie she set aside, its fate being not yet decided.

After a while Colonel Compton, as usual, lounged in, a cigar in his mouth.

"By George, Fan," he said admiringly, "that was a treat you gave us last night! Upon my soul, if I'd known you had so much spunk left in you, I'd never have advised your going on the shelf! If you could only get that young fellow as a co, you'd take the town by storm."

"Should I?" she answered, with a half yawn; but her mind seized instantly on a new idea.

"Of course you would," he went on, "and I've done a bit of *impresario* work in my time. Marks, if he'd seen it, would have offered you fifty sovs a night on the spot. The old man is no mean judge, and you saw how it angered him."

She burst into a little laugh.

"But he soon got over it. You see he has a sense of humour; if he hadn't, I could not stand him, I really couldn't!"

"Don't know about getting over it. He's down to-day with a real bad fit of the gout——"

"Is he?" she remarked coolly. "Then I shall have a holiday." As she said the words her mind travelled over the possibilities of even a few days. "Compton," she said suddenly, "I never quite understand the position of affairs in regard to Drummur's sons. The estate's entailed, isn't it?"

"Heir male of the body," replied the colonel. "That is why I warned you to look out lest Marmaduke should worm money out of his father. So long as the old man lives you're all right; but when he dies you will only have

the cash and the savings—and the title. The rest all goes to Pitt—after him, as he has no children, and isn't likely to have any—to Marmaduke as heir presumptive. After him to Peter, but Marmaduke is sure to marry; he's really a very good-looking fellow——”

She interrupted him curtly; she did not need to be told that.

“Thanks. I quite understand, only I wished to be sure.”

She passed to the window and looked out. Peter, as usual surrounded by a perfect pack of silly, silky spaniels—they suited him exactly with his wide weak mouth, long fair hair, and general exuberance of dress—was on the lawn talking to Marmaduke. The latter looked up, saw her, and bowed. She kissed her hand to him and returned to her seat, her mind still confused, but her will steady.

“Well,” she said lightly, “I suppose by and by I shall have to go in and cheer up my fiancé, but I shan't be sorry for a few days' holiday.”

She told Marmaduke so also when she appeared, exquisite and dainty, declaring that, as she was useless at home, since his father, poor dear, could not even bear the sight of her for more than five minutes, she thought it would be a fine opportunity to see a little more of the place than she had hitherto been able to; and would Marmaduke tell her where to go.

The result of which innocent interrogatory being that in the full glory of a summer afternoon, the sea calm as a mill pond, Marmaduke found himself sitting in a boat as it drifted idly beneath the old red sandstone cliffs facing the North Sea with his arm round La Fantine's

waist and a curious mixture of desire and disdain in his heart.

"You see, my dear boy," she was saying, "I dare say you think ill of me."

"I don't, I don't indeed!" he protested.

"Well, you did think ill of me," she continued, with a heavenly smile; "but I really have all the Christian virtues. That is the worst of it. I hate giving pain, or seeing people suffer. And I like doing my best for people, if I can. Now my proposition sounds rather impossible, but it really is quite feasible. I'm not going to talk about our feelings, Duke. We both of us remember last night, so we will leave them out of the question. But you are a young man, you have a future before you—that is to say, if you play your cards properly. You want to be a soldier——"

"I don't mean to be anything else," interrupted Marmaduke decidedly, "so your plan of my making money by dancing with you is out of the question."

"Not on six months' sick leave, under an assumed name? Now, Duke, listen and don't interrupt. If you and I join forces and run away from here, I will engage to get the money for your majority. I tell you any manager would advance two thousand on the *fandango* alone—or Jack Jardine could finance one half—as he always does, and I the other. Then you could join, get leave, disappear, have a real stunning six months with me—London, Paris, Vienna perhaps. You don't know what the life is like, Duke—and I'm not jealous or exacting. I like to amuse myself, and so should you."

He looked at her admiringly.

"What an imagination you have!" he said. "And

you settle everything so quickly. You remind me——” And here the thought of Marrion Paul made him suddenly shift back to the thwart and begin to scull once more. “We are nearing the current,” he said apologetically, “and she needs steering—and so do I!” he added, with a charming smile, “so go on, please, with your imaginations.”

She gave him a sharp look, saw he had still some fight left in him, and like a good fisherman let him have his head a bit.

“Of course it is all imagination,” she assented, “and it depends on whether you think it worth while to pay the price I ask for all this. I am five years older than you are, Duke” (in reality she was fifteen, but under a rose-lined sun hat years disappear), “but I am still attractive.”

She said the word so cunningly that he laid on his oars and bent forward till his burning eyes were close to hers.

“Attractive!” he echoed. “You’re more than that, and you know it—at any rate, I do!”

“I am glad of it,” she assented, “for it makes it easier for both of us; but, as I said, I don’t want to dwell on our feelings, they are too recent to be—er—reliable. It is purely as business that I put it to you. I want to get back to the old life, if I can do it with any chance of success. Last night showed me I could. But I also want to be Lady Drummuir. You want to get your majority, and also—there is no use in mincing words—to spite your father for not giving you the money. Now all these desires can be combined——”

The grating of the keel on a shingly shore interrupted

her, and Marmaduke stood up, shipped his oars, and held out both his hands.

"Let's leave it for the time, little lady, or you'll persuade me out of my persuasion that you're right. There's the most ideal spot for lovers just round that rock. Let's go there and forget everything and everybody except that I am the most delightful man in the world, and you are the most delightful—and attractive—woman!"

The hint of artificiality in his tone made her frown, but there was frank sensual admiration in his look as he set her down after lifting her from the boat.

"I think," he said softly, as he held out a finger bleeding from the prick of a pin, "you are the daintiest, thorniest thing I ever touched. You're like the roses I gave you this morning, all colour, sweetness and scent, and—thorns."

Whereat they both laughed as they made their way to the ideal spot for lovers. To their surprise and discomfiture they found it already occupied by Margaret Muir, who was looking sentimentally out to sea with the Reverend Patrick Bryce's arm round her waist.

"Meg!" cried Marmaduke, aghast.

"Oh, Marmaduke! Why? How did you come?" wailed his sister, jumping up and looking round as if for escape.

The Reverend Patrick Bryce, however, stood his ground. He was a small spare man of about fifty, dapper and spruce, his curling grey hair having the appearance of a wig under his low crowned hat, his clear, starched clerical bands natty to a degree.

"Captain Marmaduke Muir, I presume," he said, with a bow of a marquis. "I regret much exposing my dear

Miss Margaret Muir to this unpleasantness, but I beg you to believe that, as my affianced wife, I am ready to defend her to the uttermost."

Marmaduke looked from one to the other of the delinquents.

"You don't mean to say, Meg," he said at last, "that you wish to marry the minister?"

The very idea seemed to him preposterous, absurd; he almost laughed at it.

The Reverend Patrick Bryce gave her no time for reply.

"She not only desires to marry me, sir, but she is going to do so, please God, before long. Yes, sir, I propose to take her away from a demoralising atmosphere, and give her, to the utmost of my power, the love and affection she deserves."

He looked very gallant as he made his little speech, and Marmaduke acknowledged to himself that he played the gentleman well. Still, he turned again to his sister in incredulity.

"You can't do it, Meg. To begin with, if the Baron——"

"Baron Drummuir, sir, will have nothing to say to it," interrupted the little minister once more. "The Honourable Margaret Muir is of age, and if she chooses to marry a man of birth equal to her own—I do not care to boast of my ancestry, sir, but Bryce and Bruce are the same, and my family tree shows Robert of Scotland to be my immediate ancestor—she is at liberty to do so."

"That is for Lord Drummuir to decide," said Marmaduke grimly. "Of course, I shall tell him, Meg, what I've seen."

Margaret clasped her hands in entreaty.

"Oh, please, don't, Duke—please, please!"

"Margaret," interrupted the minister sharply, "oblige me by not entreating your brother to silence. Let him speak if he chooses. We are not ashamed of ourselves."

All this time Mdlle. Le Grand had been watching the scene with her sharp eyes, and her acute little brain had been working out any advantage to herself. Now she saw her way and slipped forward with a smile.

"My dear Marmaduke," she said, as the two men stood glaring at each other, "live and let live is a valuable motto. You must remember that Margaret can also tell on us. Silence on both sides is the best way out of the difficulty. Don't you think so, Miss Muir?"

Margaret gave a frightened look at her brother.

"Ah, Duke," she cried, "you don't mean to say you——"

Fantine Le Grand interrupted her with perfect aplomb.

"That has nothing to do with it, my dear young lady; but you know as well as I do what would happen if your father got wind of this excursion of ours. So, as I said, silence is wise. Don't you agree with me, sir?"

The Reverend Patrick Bryce once more made the bow of a marquis.

"I reserve the right to speak if I choose——"

"And so do I," she retorted sweetly, "only we won't choose. Come, Marmaduke, it is time we were going back. Had we not better take your sister with us? It will look better—for both sides."

And here she gave a delightful tinkle of a laugh.

She kept up the rôle so well on the return journey that simple Margaret Muir was quite fascinated, and when,

artfully, the suggestion was made that Marmaduke should see his sister home to the Dower House, the latter took the occasion to remark, as the former had hoped she would, on her surprise at finding Mdlle. Le Grand so agreeable and so well mannered.

"She is very charming," replied Marmaduke, a trifle gloomily, "and very clever."

He felt vaguely that he had been played with, and that he had had no more responsibility in the game than a pawn at chess. He felt also that the compact of silence with his sister brought imaginings nearer to reality.

And the idea of that six months on the Continent was a temptation; anyhow, he would have another go at the old man first.

If he still refused—well, on his head be it!

CHAPTER VIII

DAYS are long to a man and a woman when one of them passionately desires the other, for every instant counts, every moment spells success or failure. And Fantine Le Grand, with her almost lifelong experience of intrigue, was not one to let the grass grow under her feet. So when, two days later, Marmaduke ran over the quadrangle to beg a favour of Marrion Paul, most of his scruples had disappeared, and, for the time, at any rate, he was an admiring lover, eager to do anything and everything for the woman of the moment.

"You can, quite well, if you like, Marrion," he pleaded. "It would only be for a day or two, till Josephine could put her foot to the ground again. And Mdlle. Le Grand—she has been very much maligned, Marmie—is perfectly charming. Now do. It isn't often I ask you to do anything for me, is it?"

Marrion Paul had opened her eyes at the proposition, which was briefly that, during the temporary disablement of Mdlle. Le Grand's French maid, she should go over and take her place. She had been on the point of refusal when that "for me" startled her. Was it possible that he could count that woman's convenience his own? She hesitated, but only for a second.

"I will do what I can for you, Captain Duke," she said.

In an instant all the old charm, all the old *camaraderie* came to his voice—

"I knew you would, Marmie. I told her so. You're a real friend, you do such a lot of things for me." Then he in his turn hesitated, looked confused, and finally spoke: "I had such odd dreams that night—the night we danced, you know. I dreamt that you helped me up the stairs and—and put me to bed like a baby." He paused. "Did you, really, Marmie?"

The colour rushed to her face.

"Aye, Captain Duke, I did. Andrew was ill and you were drunk."

Her straightforward candour abashed him beyond words.

"I'm sorry," he said at last, so humbly that her heart melted within her. Then he added, with a sudden influx of joyousness, "But I'm really going to turn over a new leaf. I'm going to cut and run before long and let my father stew in his own juice."

She caught him up instantly.

"Your father's your father, Mr. Duke, and you're the heir to the old barony. You mustn't forget that. It's laid on you, and it's not to be put aside."

He paused as he was going, vexedly.

"I'm not going to put it aside, Marmie. I am only going to make the best of a bad bargain. If the old lord won't give me the money for my majority, I'm not going to stick on here getting drunk to please him."

There was distinct virtue in the last phrase, and Marmie smiled. And as she looked in the old clothes drawer for some black silk-frilled aprons which her mother had worn when she was maid to the first Lady Drummur, she told herself that Duke was nothing but—as he had said—a big baby, and that, no matter what the

dancing-woman might be like, she, Marrion, was glad to be in a position where she could see for herself what was going on.

She looked very demure, very uncompromising and upright, therefore, when that same afternoon, attired after a little coloured sketch of her mother as maid, she stood waiting for Fantine Le Grand to come up and dress for dinner. Yet, even so, the latter's instant and quite unpremeditated remark was—

“Captain Muir did not tell me you were so good-looking.”

It was a revelation to Marrion's quick wits, but she was ready in reply.

“Maybe he never looked to see, ma'am,” she said demurely, “having his eyes busy with prettier things.”

Fantine Le Grand laughed easily and her manner changed to more familiarity at once.

“You know which side your bread is buttered, my girl. So much the better. Now I wonder how much use you will be?”

“I was six years at the dressmaking, madam,” replied Marrion, “and the forewoman gave me all the touching-up work; she said I had a good hand for folds.”

Fantine gave a relieved sigh.

“Then you're not quite a bumpkin, but I suppose you can't do hair?”

“I can, a little,” said Marrion; “I learnt just a wee while in Perragier's shop in Edinburgh. The foreman wanted me to stop, but I don't care for the business.”

All of which was absolutely true; for the hairdresser who had offered her gold for her russet hair had afterwards offered her his heart and hand. What is more he

had hardly yet withdrawn his offer, and only that morning the post had brought her a long and friendly letter enclosing a sachet and a most particular account of how he had dressed the hair of all the Edinburgh celebrities in the latest fashion for the last big ball.

"I'm thinking," she went on deftly, "that the new Sevigné style would just suit madam, if she will allow me to try. There will be time to change if it doesn't please."

Five minutes later Fantine Le Grand, in pink wrapper, was watching in the glass Marrion's fingers curling and twisting and combing and puffing. And Marrion was watching the glass also, a half inherited, half acquired perception of what was beautiful and becoming aiding her lack of practice.

"My dear girl," said Fantine delighted, when Marrion stepped back, her task completed, "you're an artist! It makes me look ten years younger. You must come with me." She paused and gave a little conscious laugh. "Anyhow, you are much better than Josephine, and so I shall tell Captain Muir."

Apparently she did, for Marrion, meeting him by chance that evening on the stairs, had to draw back from his outstretched hand.

"Hang it all," he said, almost boisterously, "I forgot you were a servant here! Do you ever forget your p's and q's, I wonder? I wish you would sometimes. Anyhow, you have made her look quite divine, and she says she means to ask you to take the place permanently."

"It is very kind of *her*," replied Marrion, accenting the pronoun; but Marmaduke was too absorbed to notice it.

Only that afternoon he had had his final attack on his father's purse-strings, and had come down to the library where Jack Jardine and Peter were smoking, white with rage.

"It's all up!" he said. "The old man—I'll never call him father again—insulted me beyond bearing."

"I warned you, Duke," began Peter; "he isn't half recovered yet."

"And do you think I've got time to waste until my precious parent takes enough colchicum and nitre to kill a horse, all because he guzzles and swills? No. As I told him, Pringle won't wait over the week, so—so I'm making other arrangements. I shall have to ask you, Jack, to raise two hundred pounds to clinch the bargain when I meet Pringle. I don't know how the devil you do it, but you always do."

"Yes, I always do," assented Jardine a trifle wearily; "but you know, Duke, it would be wiser to raise the two thousand pounds at once and have done with it. If Pitt and Peter here were to join in a *post obit*, and I were to back it——"

"Thanks!" said Marmaduke curtly. "I only asked for two hundred pounds, and you can put that in the bill, can't you?"

"Yes," assented Jardine again wearily, "I can put it in the bill."

When Marmaduke had gone out of the room Peter crossed over to the fire and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"I wonder what he has got in his head," he remarked thoughtfully. "It's something to do with Fantine, *alias* Fanny Biggs, I'm sure."

"Fantine?" echoed Jack Jardine. "Why, of course, anyone can see that Marmaduke has been trying to get to the right side of her. I advised him to do so. And she, of course—by that scoundrel Compton's advice, I expect—has been trying to make the peer jealous in order to get rid of Marmaduke!"

Peter burst out laughing.

"Look here, Jack, you're excellent as a man of business, but you're a mole with women, you old bachelor! I could tell you a thing or two, but I won't—it's too amusing." And he strolled out of the room chuckling to himself.

Over in the keep-house, Marrion Paul felt that she, also, could tell a thing or two, even after the brief experience of being maid to Fantine Le Grand; but she did not find it amusing. On the contrary, it sent her about her new work with a frown in her eyes that were keen for every sign.

The day had been a troublous one. The old peer, up for the first time, had been so irritable that the whole household was upset. Fantine Le Grand, indeed, coming up for her usual late afternoon rest, had professed herself so outwearied by a protracted penance in milord's private room that she bade Marrion give her a double dose of her sleeping draught and tell the butler she was not coming down to dinner. She would have a dainty little supper in her boudoir at ten o'clock, and till then did not wish to be disturbed. Being thus set free, Marrion was going home when, as she passed the stairway leading to the room which Marmaduke had occupied and where Andrew Fraser still kept some of his master's spare things, she heard a noise as of someone shifting boxes.

Running up to see what it was, she found Andrew busy packing up.

"Aye, we're awa' the morn's morn," he replied cheerfully to her query, "and blythe am I that the finest gentleman in the Queen's army will run no more danger o' bein' ruined by a whore-woman and an auld, auld man, as s'ould be thinkin' o' his grave an' the Last Day."

Despite a sudden catch at her heart, his hearer acquiesced calmly.

"Aye, it's well he's goin'! But where is it to?"

"To Edinbro'. He's an appointment tae meet Major Pringle the morrow's morn about the exchange."

"An' when he's comin' back?" asked Marrion sharply.

"I heard no tell o' returnin', and I'm thinkin' not. Ye see the exchange he tell't me was settled into the auld regiment."

"Then his father——" she interrupted.

Andrew shook his head.

"It's no the auld lord. They had just a fearfu' stramash about it. It will be Jack Jardine again, puir fallow! He always manages it somehow. Well, he'll hae his reward at the Judgment, though I'm thinkin' he'll hae to wait till then for a reckoning."

"Maist o' us have to do that, Andry," said Marrion grimly, and then her face, looking into the hard, honest, homely face before her, softened; "an' you, abune all, abune all, my lad," she added, as she went on her way.

Andrew Fraser hesitated for a second, then followed fast.

"Thank ye for that, my dear," he said hoarsely at the foot of the stairway, "it makes it easier. An' I'll wait—aye, I'll wait till then, never fear, Marrion!"

His outstretched hand was in hers as they stood gazing into each other's eyes, his very love forgot in the flood of friendship which surged through their hearts and brains, when Miss Margaret Muir, fresh from an afternoon among the rocks with her gallant little parson, came whistling and calling to her dogs through the keep-gate. She had spent so many long years of her life without one touch of glamour and romance that, now it had come to her at last, the whole world seemed transfigured into a place full to the brim of lovers and their lasses. So in an instant the sight of those two set her becking and smiling.

"Good luck to you both!" she called. "Good luck, good luck! After all, Marrion, you see you will be asking Mr. Bryce to get you cried."

Andrew, shamefaced and confused, escaped up the stairs, but Marrion stood her ground boldly.

"There'll be scant time, Miss Marg'ret," she said, not without some scorn, "for Andrew is away with his master the morn, and Captain Duke says he will not be coming back."

Her hearer turned visibly pale. Ever since the *rencontre* on the rocks Margaret had been haunted by a fear lest Marmaduke should break the half-formulated compact of mutual silence. And now this news of his unexpected departure sent a thousand wild conjectures to her mind. Had he quarrelled with his father over the woman? Had he in revenge told——

"Going away!" she gasped. "I didn't know. Surely it's very sudden! Why? Can my father have found out about Mdlle. Le Grand——" Then realising her slip, she went on hurriedly, "But it is all nonsense about Duke's saying he will not come back. The boys always

say that when there is a quarrel; but father forgets, and so do they, as you know quite well, Marrion. And it's only right that it should be so, for after all he is their father, isn't he?"

"Aye, Miss Marg'ret," replied Marrion gravely, "my Lord Drummuir is the present holder o' the barony, an' Captain Marmaduke is the heir to it if the Master has no son; so that settles it outright."

Margaret Muir looked at her with a sort of wistful surprise.

"You put things very plain, Marrion," she said, "but you always were a sensible girl; and, being what you are, your grandfather's granddaughter—you—you belong to Drummuir, as it were."

When she had passed on whistling and calling to her dogs, Marrion Paul stood echoing those last words in her heart. Yes, she belonged to Drummuir; but over and above that inherited loyalty there was a passion of protection for Duke himself. He must not be harmed in any way.

Was there indeed anything between him and the painted woman she was serving?

Before she wakened her for the dainty supper at ten o'clock that evening Marrion stood looking at the sleeping face, all its charm of *espièglerie* gone, the mouth cruel, the lines about the eyes hard and set.

No, whatever came, that woman should not have the spoiling of Duke's life! Not that there could be much fear since he was leaving the next day.

CHAPTER IX

NO danger !

The thought—such an ill-considered thought, it seemed—recurred to Marrion Paul as she held a slip of crumpled paper in her hand and read its slight contents over and over again.

She had found it on the floor of the room where Andrew Fraser had packed up his master's spare things. There had been heaps of other papers on the floor, when, during the time that Fantine Le Grand was on duty with the old lord, Marrion, more to still thought than from necessity, had set herself the task of clearing up and making tidy ; but this one showed her Duke's handwriting, and, half mechanically, she had reached down to pick it up. And then ? Women, as a rule, have not nearly so hard and fast a rule of conventional honour as men on such points, so she had smoothed it out and read—

Evidently a memorandum made to help out a memory excellent in its way, but random, careless.

“Write for rooms at Cross-keys. Order trap from Crow ; 9.30, copse by avenue gate.”

She drew in her breath and considered, her thoughts punctuated by the rapid beating of her heart.

The Cross-keys ? That was the inn where the south coach stopped, and where the ferry road branched off ;

she could almost see it from her window across the estuary on the edge of the moorland. What did Marmaduke want with rooms there? And the trap from the Crow? That was the little inn down in the back purlieus of the town. For whom was that trap wanted? And why not order from the big posting hotel as usual?

Then in an instant a solution flashed upon her. Marmaduke had not really gone by the afternoon coach; or, if he had, so far, was to return that night to the Cross-keys, and the trap was to take Fantine Le Grand to him by the bridge road!

The beating of her heart steadied itself. She folded up the paper and put it in her pocket, her vehement determination, somehow or another, to frustrate this plan almost forgotten for the time in wonder at the chance which had brought to her this knowledge.

The paper must have fallen out of the pocket of some coat Andrew had been packing up—how easily it might not so have fallen! How easily she might not have noticed it! A facile wonder obscured real thought, and, as usual in such sudden crises, concrete determination hid itself under one general determination to frustrate the machinations of the enemy, if possible. She did not even ask herself how this was to be done; all she told herself was that it *must* be done.

So, rousing to a sense that afternoon was passing to evening, and that it was time for her to be in attendance at the castle, she went thither, feeling vaguely that if it was necessary to kill the woman, even that must be done, sooner than she should be allowed to hamper Marmaduke's young life.

Fantine Le Grand had not yet come up from her daily

duty of amusing Lord Drummur, so Marrion mechanically began, as usual, to prepare for the evening's toilette. She found all the valuables gone from the jewel-case, and, after a hasty search, discovered them in a tiny valise, ready packed hidden away behind laces and ribbons in a drawer.

So she had been right. Fantine Le Grand meant to give them the slip. Ere she had time to consider a fretful voice came from the boudoir.

"Marrion, Marrion! I do hope the girl's there. Just like 'em if she isn't. Ah," as Marrion appeared at the door, "for heaven's sake, girl, take off my shoes and bring me my dressing-gown! That wretched old man has worn me out. I shall be fit for nothing! Oh, lord, it was too bad—nothing would please him! What o'clock is it? Six o'clock! Good gracious, I shall hardly have time before dinner! I won't go down; there's no one to go down for now Marmaduke's gone. Lord, what a relief it will be! Tell them to bring dinner up here at eight and give me my sleeping drops. Not too much, as I don't want to sleep too long; but I have such a headache, I shan't be fit for anything without a rest."

Fantine Le Grand did not see her attendant's face. Had she done so, she would have been startled. The colour had left it, every feature was set and hard. For she had found the clue. Even if an overdose killed the woman, she must be made to sleep sound.

"Yes, madam," she replied, "but a rest will take your headache away, I hope."

She poured out the narcotic without a tremble, doubling the double dose. It was a risk, of course; but risks must be run.

"That is very strong—how much did you give me?" asked Fantine, as, with a sigh of content, she snuggled down under the *duvet*.

"Only as much as was necessary," replied Marrion steadily.

Her heart was hard as the nether millstone. She waited in the boudoir till the soft regular breathing told her Fantine was asleep, then, giving orders in passing that her mistress did not wish to be disturbed, she made her way back to her own room at the keep-house in order to mature further plans. In this she was hampered by ignorance as to what she had to frustrate. It would have been easy to walk down to the Crow and countermand the trap, but for aught she knew to the contrary, Marmaduke might be awaiting Mdlle. Le Grand there; so she judged it better to adhere as far as possible to what she did know, and this pointed to someone taking the trap, as ordered—whether to the Cross-keys or not, mattered little—and meeting Marmaduke. The very idea stirred her blood! Of course she must do it. She must go and beg him—nay, force him to reconsider an action which would for ever ruin him with his father.

The colour came back to her face, the light to her eyes, with this decision, and her mind was busy at once with precautions.

The Cross-keys, she knew, was held by new people who would not be likely to know her; still she must do her best to avoid recognition. To begin with she must secure retreat. She looked down the estuary, then at low tide, and little more than a still pool with a faint stream in it, and saw no boat at the further side. That, however, could easily be remedied. The castle boat lay this side,

and it would not take her half an hour to row it over and swim back.

By this time it was full seven o'clock, the shadows were lengthening and everyone at the castle would be busy with dinner. Now was her opportunity. Ten minutes afterwards in her bathing suit, but wrapped in her plaid, and with a lighted lantern at the bottom of the boat, for she remembered it would be dark on the return journey, she was pulling with long vigorous strokes to the little pier of seaweed-grown slippery rocks. To fasten the boat to the outermost ring on the shore, so that she could get at it at all tides, and hang the lantern over the bows as a guide to the whereabouts, did not take her long. That done, she folded the plaid away, placed it in the stern sheets, and slipped over the side like a seal.

So much, then, was done. She must now go and carry up Fantine Le Grand's supper and then prepare herself to take the latter's place.

She was relieved to find all well. Fantine lay comfortably snuggled up, very dead asleep it is true, but breathing quietly and regularly, and Marrion, with a lighter heart, for all it was still hard as the nether millstone, closed the door on her, secure that no interruption was likely to come from that side.

And now to disguise herself so as to pass muster with the driver of the coach, should he happen to be an acquaintance. This was easy enough. High heels, silk stockings, a little lace, a furbelow or two, and a big black silk cloak go far in semi-darkness, and all these were to be found in her mother's wardrobe.

Having time to spare, indeed, Marrion spent it, half-eagerly, half-reluctantly, in seeing how near she could

bring herself to the daintinesses of modern fashion. And she so far succeeded that, as she went away from the looking-glass, her face showed radiant, as of a girl going to her first ball. Unconfessed, the thought was there that Marmaduke would see her so, possibly in the discarded brocades worn by his own mother in her youth; anyhow, in the garments of his own class.

So, with the ample cloak round her, its hood drawn over the shining hair piled in the latest fashion, she made her way to the copse by the avenue gate. The chariot with two horses was in waiting; the driver, touching his hat, asked if there was no luggage. She answered no, stepped in, and they were off. Evidently the man had his orders, for they skirted the town and crossed the river by the lower and older bridge. This lengthened the journey by some two miles; so much the better. It would be quite dark by the time they arrived at the Cross-keys. Hitherto Marrion's mind had been fully occupied with action. Now, in this hour's drive, she had time to think of what would happen when she met Marmaduke, and her heart sank a little. Not that she was afraid of him or of herself, but it was all so strange, so unlike real life. Then in a flash came the memory of that dawn-tide swim of theirs! That was not common, trivial, everyday life either. They two had somehow the trick of escaping from that sometimes. Why not now?

The day had been brilliantly fine and warm, but with the sun setting, clouds had gathered and lay dark and threatening on the horizon, though the moon rode unobscured high in the heavens. A few spots of heavy rain fell in great splashes, and the bustling landlady of the Cross-keys, as she came to the door, was full of congratulation.

lations that madam had escaped the thunderstorm which was evidently brewing. Meantime, Captain Muir, who had not expected his lady quite so soon, was away in the kennels to see if some medicine which he—kindly gentleman—had prescribed for a puppy ill of distemper had bettered the poor beastie; but he would be back syne and the rooms were ready.

This was a relief to Marrion as it ensured that their meeting would be private; so she followed the landlady upstairs, the latter asking if Mrs. Muir would rather a cup of tea, or to go to bed at once, since she would have to be up so early to catch the first coach south.

Marrion, as she refused both suggestions, felt startled at the Mrs. Muir. Was it possible that there was to be more than a mere intrigue? In Scotland one did not pose so easily as married—unless indeed Marmaduke was reckless—he was so, often——

She glanced round the bedroom into which she was shown, recognising that some of the luggage in it must be a woman's, then passed into the sitting-room adjoining. The fire had lately been lit, doubtless with a view to a sudden chilliness foretelling the coming storm, and the flames of its crackling wood danced on the walls, making the two lighted candles on the table unnecessary. Half mechanically she blew them out, and with a sombre, almost stern face, stood watching the blazing sticks.

Suddenly a cheerful well-known voice rose below.

"The puppy's much better, Mrs. McTavish. What, my wife has come? That's all right."

My wife! For an instant Marrion's head whirled. Was she too late? No. Confused memories of what in

Scotland constituted an irregular marriage sent a flood of crimson to her face as she realised that Duke had all unwittingly acknowledged her as his "wife" before witnesses. His footsteps coming up the stairs two steps at a time steadied her; but what followed shook her to her very foundations. Unheeding of her feeble "Duke" as he opened the door, he was across the room holding her in his arms and passionately kissing her averted face, her neck, her hair.

"This is good," he whispered. "Now for a splendid honeymoon!"

For a second she yielded; then she wrenched herself from him and faced him fairly.

"You're making a mistake, Captain Muir," she said sharply, "I am only Marrion Paul."

She would have liked to add "your friend"; but she dared not. At the moment she knew she was far more than that.

"Marmie!" he echoed stupidly. "Marmie!"

At first he was too surprised for more; then he drew himself up and stared at her angrily.

"What the deuce are you doing here?" he said at last, adding hastily, as possibilities struck him, "Did she send you? Is she ill?"

In her long drive the girl had gone over and over the coming interview, settling what she would say, but the sudden solicitude of his tone swept all her preparations away. Did he then really care? If so, nothing but the naked truth would be any use.

"No," she replied calmly, only her tightly interlaced fingers showing the tension of her mind and body. "She is quite well. I gave her a double dose of her sleeping

drops to prevent her coming. I came instead because I wanted to speak to you."

The flickering firelight showed sheer anger on the young man's face—sheer brutal anger.

"Because you wanted to take her place, eh?"

She gave a little sort of sob. What would she not have given to take it? The very intensity of her desire made her pass the insult by.

"It is no use being angry," she said quietly. "I came to try and make you hear reason. You may as well listen. She can't come to-night, and surely, meanwhile, we can sit down and talk it over—as friends!"

"We used to be friends, I admit," he replied coldly; "but if you are going to presume on friendship as you appear to have done, the sooner the farce ends the better."

For all that he sat down, his bold eyes taking in every detail of her altered appearance.

"Your dress suits you," he jibed. "I suppose you put it on to——"

"I had to put it on," she interrupted; "I had to pass muster. I didn't want to set the town talking. You know, as well as I, that it wasn't easy—it wasn't pleasant."

"No one asked you to do it," he replied, "and I wonder how you had the—the cheek!" Then suddenly he laughed; he could not help it. The whole business tickled him and his eyes took on a certain admiration. "It beats cock-fighting, my dear," he went on. "No one but you would have dared to do it. But it won't do, Marmie. You don't understand. That old man—I won't call him my father, Marmie—won't give me the two thousand pounds for my majority. Fantine Le Grand has shown me how to get it, and I——" He

paused; in sober truth now he came to think of the plan for so getting it, the less it appealed to him.

Marrion waited a second, then said—

“How?”

There was no reason why he should have answered her categorically, but he did; perhaps at the back of his mind was a desire to know what she thought of it. He gave a forced laugh.

“We are to dance for it. Oh, I know all the stuff that’s talked about dancing men and women, but we would go abroad! I should get leave of absence for six months on urgent private affairs, and no one would be a bit the worse.”

“*You* would!” commented Marrion briefly.

There was a world of scornful criticism in the words.

“Oh, dash it all,” cried Marmaduke, “a man can’t always ride the high horse! And you’ve put me in the deuce of a hole, though I suppose you meant well. You see, I can’t wait for her now, as I must see Pringle to-morrow; but I can come back again,” he added complacently, “and I will.”

“Then you mean to—to marry—that woman?” put in Marrion.

He rose angrily and began to pace up and down the room. In sober truth once more, now that he was away from Fantine Le Grand’s allurements, he had begun to wonder if he were not paying rather dearly for his two thousand pounds.

“Of course I do; it’s in the bond, and I’m a man of my word. And you’ve no right to call her that woman. She is far better than you think, and I am very fond of her, very fond of her indeed!” He stopped opposite

Marrion with a certain defiance. The blaze of the fire had died down; it was almost dark, save for a red glow on their faces. "Of course," he went on, "I ought to be deucedly angry with you, Marmie; but somehow I'm not, and if you will only take her a note from me——"

She started to her feet passionately.

"A note!" she echoed, her voice vibrating with scorn. "Oh, Duke, Duke, sometimes I wonder if you can understand?—if any man ever understands? I came here, risking all, everything for you; you've been the sun in my heaven ever since I can remember; you've always been something very bright and very far away that is not to be touched or harmed. Yes, I come here to beg you not to ruin yourself body and soul, and you ask me to take a note!"

A sudden flash of lightning from the storm, now nigh at hand, lit up the room for a second, and showed her to him standing white and rigid like some accusing angel.

"You say you're fond of her, but you're not. I tell ye you're no fond of her, Duke; ye ken na what love is—an' I do—for I love the verra ground you tread on, the verra things you've touched——"

Her voice, which in the extremity of her passion had forgotten its acquired accent, failed; she sank back to her seat, and, throwing her arms out over the table, buried her face in them.

And a great silence fell between them, man and woman.

At last he laid his hand on her shoulder, and spoke humbly.

"I beg your pardon, Marmie; I did not understand. But I'm not worth it, child. Let me go my way——"

She pulled herself together.

"It's time I was going home," she said, unsteadily.

"You can't go in this storm," he put in relieved, as all men are, that the mental storm was over, "you'd better stop here for the night. I"—he went to the fire and deliberately lit the candles, as if, with their light, to bring things back to normal again—"I—I'll find a bed somewhere, and you can stop——"

Marrion interrupted him hastily.

"No, no, I must go! Folk will wonder. The boat is on this shore. I can easily slip over."

He walked to the window and looked out.

"It's raining cats and dogs; you can't go!" he said masterfully. "You stop here like a good girl, and I'll go and settle up something for myself."

He left the room and for one second she stood irresolute. Should she stop? He had called her his wife, would doubtless call her so again to the landlady, and if she stopped—if she stopped——

Then, with a little sob, she caught up her cloak and ran downstairs. The night was dark, but the moon shone fitfully between rifts in the clouds. The rain, coming in gusts with the wind, had ceased for a moment. She drew the hood of her cloak over her head and ran swiftly past the lighted windows of the bar, thinking she had escaped; but a moment after she heard swift steps following her own and, turning to look, saw Marmaduke, hatless, coatless, in pursuit.

The instinct of the chase awoke in her in a second; she doubled off the white road behind the shelter of a low beech copse.

"Marmie, Marmie, stop, I tell you! Don't be a little fool!"

Easy to say that. But it was he was the fool, not she. If she kept in such cover as there was she might reach the boat before him—she must ! In the old days she had run as quick as he ; and she knew where the boat was and he didn't.

She tucked her petticoats high above the knee like any Leezie Lindsay and ran as for dear life. If she had failed in her mission—and had she ?—she would not fail here. That last double had been successful. His cry of “Marmie, Marmie, don't be so foolish, dear !” sounded quite far off—like the wail of a plover.

Now it came nearer. Perhaps he had seen the lantern she had left to guide her own steps to the boat. If so, she had no time to lose, as he would make straight for it, and so must she, forsaking the bend to avoid a peat bog, and braving the moss hags even in the dark. Anyhow, she was lighter than he, and would not sink so deep ; though, after the long spell of fine weather, the bog could not be very bad. And this was the worst part of it. With the ease of long practice she jumped lightly from hag to hag, sparing no time to look round for the figure behind her, though she knew it must be perilously near ; for that instinct of the chase was as strong in him, perhaps stronger, than it was in her. Her cheeks were flushed, her eye was bright, her heart beat high, despite her breathlessness, and she knew that his did so also. Briefly they had both forgotten everything save their determination to have their own way.

“Marmie, you little devil, stop, I tell you !” came his voice close behind her. Then a splash, a loud “damnation,” told her that he had missed his hag.

That would give her time. She redoubled her speed,

raced to the shore, and, not pausing to unfasten the boat, waded through the water, almost swimming the last bit, to where it rode at anchor on the outgoing tide. Clambering over the side she set to work at once to unknot the rope from the bow-ring. Not a second too soon, for Marmaduke, after a minute's delay, due to his flounder and an unavailing search for the shore ring, had found it.

"Got you!" he cried joyfully, but he spoke too soon. The rope, undone, gave easy way to his strong pull, and the boat, with Marrion laughing in the bows, drifted slowly out from the shore.

He stood looking at her, the useless rope in his hand. By the light of the moon, now riding serene overhead (for the brief summer storm had passed the zenith and now lay to the south, a dense bank of black quivering every now and again with throbs of summer lightning), he could see her tall and white, for her cloak had long since been flung aside, and heart-whole admiration possessed him.

"Marmie," he cried, "hold up—or, by God, I'll swim after you. I want to speak to you."

She took an oar, stopped her way by holding on to one of the submerged seaweed-covered rocks of the boat-pier and waited.

"Why did you run away? Why wouldn't you stop?"

She gave him the truth squarely and fairly.

"Because I should have passed as your wife, and if I had chosen I might——" She hesitated, and he relieved her by a low whistle.

"By Jove!" he said slowly, almost absently. "I didn't think of that, but"—he hesitated, in his turn—"but I thought, Marmie, you said you—you loved me!"

His voice lingered and lowered in altogether distracting fashion.

She turned hastily to the other oar, and let the blade drop into the water with a splash.

"Aye," she said, "that's why! For see, you—you've got to be Lord Drummuir!"

Her words silenced him. He watched her scull away, a dark shadow in the darkling water. Then his voice rang out to her as it were from very far off.

"Flash the light to me, Marmie, dear, when you get to the other side. I'll wait till I see you're safe."

CHAPTER X

BROAD sunlight showed through the chinks of the drawn curtains when Fantine Le Grand awoke. She lay yawning for a minute or two, content to be still drowsy. Then memory returned, and she was out of bed in a second and at the window. The lawns lay dewy, a late blackbird was tugging away at an inadvertent worm, and shrill on the morning air rose the sound of Davie Sim's pipes playing "Hey! Johnnie Cope, are ye waukin' yet?" as he came up from the keep to strut through the corridors of the castle. It must be eight o'clock! And—what had happened? How had she come to sleep so long? She passed swiftly, being quick of thought, to the dressing-table and took up the bottle of sleeping drops. It was half empty.

Almost before she had time to realise this, and what it might possibly mean, a knock came to the door, and Marrion Paul, opening it, came into the room with a can of hot water.

She had been there at the earliest possible moment to satisfy herself that all was right, so she was not surprised to see Fantine Le Grand on foot. The look on the latter's face, however, the bottle in her hand, gave warning of what was to come, and it came instantly short and sharp, for Fantine had plenty of wit.

"Why did you give me what you did?" she asked imperiously.

Marrion Paul set down the water-can and faced her.

"Because I wanted to prevent you from joining Captain Muir at the Cross-keys," she replied quietly. It was waste of time, she felt, to beat about the bush with this woman, the solid truth was her best weapon.

It proved so for the moment. Fantine utterly taken aback retired into personal injury.

"You might have killed me," she began, almost whimperingly.

"Maybe," interrupted Marrion, "but I had to risk it—an' it's no hurt you——"

A sense of outrage came to her victim.

"Not hurt me, indeed! And why had you to risk it? Are you Captain Muir's keeper? His mistress you are, of course; but if you think you've succeeded you're very much mistaken. I shall join him by the coach to-morrow instead of to-day. And you may thank your stars that, as I don't want any fuss just now, you'll get scot free of your attempt to murder me. Now go! I never want to see your face again. Josephine will manage somehow, I've no doubt."

She pointed to the door, and Marrion, going down the wide stairs, felt relieved that that, at least, was over. The interview also had given her a clue as to what must be her next step. Mdlle. Le Grand had said that fuss would be inconvenient; for that reason, therefore, a fuss must be made. Hitherto she had hesitated between taking a further and still more active part in stopping the intrigue, or leaving the matter to Marmaduke's own good sense, which, removed from Fantine's personal influence, might surely be trusted. He could not want to marry the woman. It was the two thousand pounds he wanted.

Marrion on her way to the keep-house made up her mind to risk everything by an appeal to the old lord ; it would, at any rate, put a spoke in the woman's wheel for a time, and prevent her getting away to Marmaduke at once ; it would, at any rate, make a fuss.

As a matter of fact, more fuss was facing Marrion than she had bargained for, since the first thing she saw on entering the keep-house was her step-grandmother seated at the table sipping a cup of tea she had just made for herself.

It was an unpleasant surprise, as she had not been expected home so soon, and Marrion bit her lip with vexation at the sight of her. After laying elaborate plans to avoid even the sight of one she despised and detested, it was bitter to find her established as mistress in the house. So anger kept her silent and Mrs. Sim, whilom Penelope of the castle, said no word either. She simply rose theatrically and stretched a dramatic finger across the table. So standing she showed like a wide extinguisher, the knob of which was formed by her head. This was still small and, so far as the upper part of the face was concerned, unmarred by fat, but obesity began on the double chin and went on increasing from shoulder to waist, from waist to hip, till the flounce of a wide petticoat completed the base of the triangle. Her hair of bright orange-red was untouched by grey, and the china-blue of her hard eyes startled you by the intensity of their colour in a face otherwise somewhat tallowy.

"Ye hizzie !" she said at last, in a deep contralto voice. "I wonder ye have the face to stan' there disgracin' the honest hearth o' an honest man ! Awa wi' you, ye baggage, afore yer faither comes to beat you frae the door."

Marrion had stood with open mouth before this sudden onslaught; now she recovered herself and said haughtily—

"I do not understand." In her heart of hearts, however, she told herself that this woman knew of last night's happenings.

Penelope Sim gave a snort and sat down again to sipping her tea.

"Div' ye no understand?" she asked scornfully. "Then I'll tell ye. A lassie that goes tae spend the night wi' a man in a strange hottle is no ane to share an honest woman's home. An' so I'll tell yer faither. Shame upon ye, Marrion Paul!"

"Perhaps you'll oblige me, Mrs. Sim, by holding your tongue," retorted Marrion superbly. "I did not spend the night with any man, and if you say I did, you lie!"

"My certy!" cried Penelope, her face flaming. "So I'm a liar, am I? I tell you I saw you wi' my own eyes at the Cross-keys——"

"And what might you be doing there?" put in Marrion. "No good, likely."

Mrs. Penelope's voice began to rise.

"I'm no goin' to bandy words wi' you, Marrion Paul, ye're no worth it. But here comes your gran'faither; give your lip to him, if ye like. Ye sall no give it to me, a decent, married woman!"

"Decent!" echoed Marrion scornfully, and would have gone on to heaven knows what of indignant criticism had not the entry of her grandfather tied her tongue for she was fond of him, with all his faults, and he represented to her the only family life she had ever known.

So she stood defiant as Penelope of the castle, gloating

over her own newly acquired propriety, held forth on what she had seen from the bar-parlour of the Cross-keys.

"Grandfather," she said at last, "you know me better than she does. Do you think I would do such a thing?"

"Ask her," broke in the shrilled contralto voice, "ask her, gudeman, if she was at the Cross-keys last night. I tell you she was, dressed up fine like a lady—an' the things lyin' yet in her room, for I went to see. Aye, ask her if she was there wi' a young spark—they tell't me it was Captain Duke, but that I'll never believe——"

"You may believe what you like!" put in Marrion fiercely. "But I'll tell you the truth, grandfather. I was at the Cross-keys last night, and I did see Captain Duke, but it was no harm I was after."

"Hark to her!" shrilled Penelope. "She was there, and for no harm! Out o' the house with her, Davie Sim, or your wedded wife will find her way out hersel'."

Here Davie who, man-like, had looked from one to the other of the two women, uncertain of approbation or reprobation, shook his head and began mumblingly—

"I never thocht, Marrion, to praise God your poor mother is in her grave, but if she'd lived to see this day——"

"Leave my mother alone, please grandfather," said Marrion, passion in voice and manner. "If you choose to judge me by that cast-off creature, do so! But there's no need to quarrel about it. You know I would not sleep under the same roof with her——"

"Hark to her, hark to her, an' me as gude a wife as ever stepped. Are ye goin' tae put up wi' that, Davie Sim?" whimpered Penelope.

Once more the master of the house looked as though he would speak, but a wave of Marrion's hand stopped him.

"So I shall leave this evening, and if what I've done is a disgrace to you, you have the remedy in your own hands—you can hold your tongues. So that ends it!"

She made her way past them and up the stairs, feeling a trifle dazed. This unlooked-for recognition complicated matters for herself; but did not alter her determination to risk all in order to get Marmaduke out of the hands of Fantine Le Grand.

So she packed up her things, leaving all the treasures of her childhood and her mother's, unlocked in drawers and cupboards, and sitting down on her bed by the window took her last look out over the rugged coast she had watched so often by storm and shine, by night and by day. And as she looked with lack-lustre, preoccupied eyes her thoughts were busy, not with the past but with the new life that was opening out before her; since, come what might, she realised that never again would she be simple Marrion Paul, old Davie Sim's granddaughter. To begin with, if she knew aught of Penelope, reputation was gone. Women of that sort were pitiless, and, in addition, her grandfather's wife desired nothing more than to make Drummuir and all belonging to it an impossibility for her step-granddaughter. Then she, Marrion, had definitely set herself the task of defending Marmaduke, and heaven only knew how far that might take her. For one thing, in view of Penelope's curiosity, she must make sure that Marmaduke had not left anything incriminating behind him at the Cross-keys. It

would be so like him to write Captain the Honourable Marmaduke Muir and Mrs. Muir in the visitor's book !

The idea made her smile tenderly, even while she took a mental note that it must be seen to.

So, going down, while it was yet early, to order a handcart to take her slight luggage to the coach office, she came upon a castle stable-boy, who was a distant admirer of hers, riding to the Cross-keys with a note.

"It's frae the dancin' woman," said the lad, with a broad grin, "an' she guve me a golden soverin' to take it quick; an' I've to leave anither at the Crow."

"I can deliver that one," said Marrion cheerfully, "for I'm goin' yon way."

So, note in hand, she made her way to the Crow, and by a dexterous question or two elicited the fact that, as on the previous night, a carriage was ordered to be in waiting at half-past nine. If all went well, therefore, she might hope to avail herself of it. She did not, however, anticipate exactly what she meant to do—her plans were fluid, so much depending on the success of her next step. It was an overwhelmingly bold one, and she shivered visibly as she sat waiting for an answer to her request to be allowed an interview with his lordship.

"I'm right sure his lordship wad see me," she pleaded with Dewar, the valet, who in common with all the men-servants at the castle, had an approving eye on her good looks, "did he ken what I cam' about; and"—she added, with a laugh that was a challenge—"I'm no sae ill-looking but he might be blythe to see me forbye business."

"An' that's God's truth, my dear," replied Dewar gallantly, "sae I'll see what I can do."

Fortune favoured him, for Fantine Le Grand being in

an evil, reckless temper had just sent to say she had a headache and could not come to amuse his lordship, who, up and dressed to receive her as usual, was cursing and swearing at womankind in the abstract, and therefore, not unwilling to have a concrete specimen on which to vent his ill-humour.

Marrion Paul, consequently, found herself without delay facing the heavy figure in the big padded chair. One foot swathed in flannels lay on a leg-rest, and the large hand that clasped the lion-head knobs of the arm-chair showed swollen and disfigured by gout; still there was something dignified, almost regal, in the pose of the man; while his face—Marrion, despite her thumping heart, as she looked above the treble chin to the open forehead, felt that here, when all was said and done, was kinship with Marmaduke.

And she for her part pleased the old man's eye also. She had not dressed herself for the occasion, but stood in her usual striped petticoat and bed-gown with a green tartan shoulder shawl of the Muir tartan and a snood of tartan ribbon to match in the red bronze coils of hair.

"So you're Marrion Paul?" he said, his keen clear blue eyes taking in every point of her person. "I haven't seen you to speak to since you were so high. You're a devilish good-looking girl. Come and give me a kiss, my lass."

To his surprise, amusement, and approval she stepped forward instantly and obeyed. The touch of her cool lips on his seemed to stagger him.

"Don't object to kisses—hey?" he said, as she remained standing close beside him.

"Why should I, Drummuir," she replied quietly, "when you've kenned me since I was a baby in arms."

He burst into one of his guffaws of rough laughter.

"Hey? What? One for the old reprobate! Sit down, my dear, and tell me what you want."

"It's about Mr. Marmaduke, sir," she began, her voice shaking a little.

"Hey? What? Has that young devil been—no, I beg your pardon, my dear, you're not that sort. Trust a man who's kicked over the traces a bit to know an honest horse when he sees one. You take my word for it; the best judge of a good woman is a bad man. Well, what of Duke?"

The mere abbreviation of the name was encouraging. She felt that to attempt a bargain, even to beg for patience, would be a mistake. She simply took her courage in both hands and told him all she knew. He sat, his unwieldy body impassive as some carven image, one strong emotion after another sweeping over the mobile face that held so much laughter in every line that Time had graven on it. Only once or twice he interrupted her when, fearing she was too lengthy, she began to cut out details. Then his quick "Let's have it all; don't you know, you're as good as a play. Beat the immortal wizard all to bits! Don't skip"—brought her back to the accessories of her tale. When she had finished he sat and looked at her for a second.

"And you say Duke let you go as you came? Well, he was a d——d young fool; that's all I've got to say! I wouldn't in his place. Even now—my God, what a Lady Drummuir you'd make, if it wasn't for the curse of class! I'll turn Socialist before I die." He paused,

and his blue eyes narrowed. "Now, why have you come and told me all this?"

She had her answer ready, and all fear of the old man having vanished she gave him the truth boldly.

"Because I want payment. I've put it into your power to stop Mdlle. Fantine——"

His whole face changed in a second, an expression of sheer devilish anger took possession of it.

"You leave that alone!" he thundered. "I can settle that business for myself."

It was the first mistake she had made, and she became more wary.

"I want payment," she went on, "because I've risked everything for—for Duke. My father's turned me out of his house and Penelope——"

"Damn Penelope!" broke in his lordship complacently. "Having no virtue of her own, she's deuced careful about other people's. And so Duke really contemplated marrying Fantine in order to make two thousand pounds by dancing. Confound the boy! He can dance, I'll allow; but it was a big price to pay. And the idea of my son dancing for money! He must have been hard put to it, even to entertain the idea." He bent those blue eyes of his suddenly on her. "And so you want me to give Duke the two thousand pounds myself, do you? Of course you do! Trust a woman who is in love asking for the moon." He paused a moment and gave a little laugh. "Heaps of women have asked me to be a saint, my dear, but I never could compass virtue. However, you've given me as good a morning's entertainment as ever I had in my life; and what's more you've given me an opportunity of as fine an afternoon's amusement."

Here he chuckled wickedly, then added, "Shall I give you the cheque or send it direct?"

She felt staggered at his indifference. She had expected to brave his anger and have perchance to threaten him with what she knew of Fantine's plans for the evening; but, here, with scarce an argument, she found herself successful. In truth she had not gauged accurately the phenomenal malice as well as the almost incredible good nature of the man.

"You must send it, my lord," she said swiftly. "There is no need to say anything about all this."

He frowned in a second.

"Do you mean to dictate to me, my good girl?" he asked fiercely. "You'd better leave the business in my hands. I'll settle it to my own satisfaction. Come back at six o'clock and you shall be made acquainted with my decision."

He rang the hand-bell on the table beside him and when Dewar entered, said carelessly :

"Show the young woman out; and, Dewar, tell Penelope to come and see me at two o'clock. And, Dewar, send a message to the Manse and tell that jackanapes of a parson Bryce that I want to confess my sins or something of that sort. Tell him I'm ill—dying, if you like—anything—and I want him as soon as he can come. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Dewar discreetly, though he was considerably mystified; but everyone in the castle knew there was but one way of receiving Lord Drummuir's orders, acquiescence and obedience.

CHAPTER XI

AN hour or so afterwards Fantine Le Grand coming in from a ramble on the rocks, whither she had gone despite her pretended headache, in order to quiet her nerves for what she foresaw was to be a stand-up fight between her and Marrion, found old Lord Drummur in possession of her boudoir. He was in his wheeled-chair, but was looking remarkably spruce in a blue coat with brass buttons, an immaculate white stock and frill, and his gouty foot was swathed in kersey to match the breeches he wore. His ruddy face was all smiles, but there was a vicious look in the blue eyes that reminded her of a horse about to kick.

And kick he did with a force that left her breathless.

"I've come to tell you," he said, "that we are going to be married this evening."

She recoiled as if from a blow.

"Now, don't be foolish and make a fuss," he continued, as she gave a little cry, "or you won't look well in your wedding-dress!" So far he had gone lightly; but now he settled down to a decision of voice and manner that was positively terrifying to the woman in its intensity. "I tell you I won't have any fuss, and I know everything. Marrion Paul told it me from start to finish, and I don't want to hear any more about it, if you please!"

The mock politeness of the last finished her. She was ill-bred, not over brave, and reverting to her early up-

bringing she burst into a torrent of abuse of the viper, the hussy who was no better than she should be, who, if Penelope at the keep-house was to be believed—and she had seen her but now—had——

So far Lord Drummur had let her storm; now he stopped her impatiently.

“I know what Penelope says,” he snarled, “and I shall be sorry for her when she hears what I have to say. And I know you, Fanny, down to the ground. You’re not a bad sort, but you are getting old. Look in the glass, you foolish woman, and you’ll see I’m right. But you suit me and I mean to have you. There’s an end of it.”

She summoned up a little courage.

“And supposing I won’t! I am a free woman.”

He lowered his brows and his words cut like a knife.

“Don’t tell lies! You’re not free. You think I paid your debts. I wasn’t such a fool till I had you fast. Look here, when I heard all about this midsummer madness with Marmaduke—the d——d impertinence of trying to inveigle my son into posturing at the Courts of Europe for pennies almost made me give you your *congé*, miss, I can tell you—I sent for Compton. You think I don’t know what he is to you; but I do. If he’d known of this business, I’d have kicked you both out. But he didn’t, poor devil; he was flabbergasted. So I saw it was all your fault and I determined to punish you, and I’m going to do it my own way. Now, don’t look like a frightened hare; I never touched a woman save in the way of kindness all my life, and we’ll get on all right once we’re married; so the sooner the better.”

She sat and looked at him, dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief. The bald truth of it all took words from

her, and her one feeling was that she could cheerfully have strangled Marrion Paul for her courage and straightforwardness.

"My wedding-dress isn't ready," she sobbed at last futilely, and the old man leant back in his chair and roared with laughter.

"By Gad, Fan," he bawled, "you're a woman, and no mistake; so don't make those eyes of yours too red with crying. Remember, you're not so young as you were. And as for this little *penchant* of yours for Marmaduke, why, God bless my soul, my dear, you've had dozens such episodes, and so have I, by Gad, so we'll suit each other down to the ground. Now, if you will please ring the bell for Dewar, I'll leave you to prepare—six o'clock sharp. I've told the gardeners to send you some orange blossoms from the houses and to decorate the hall. My daughters will be your bridesmaids."

When his wheeled-chair had gone the effect of his brutal determination, his colossal masterfulness, did not pass with it. That remained, and Fantine Le Grand gave in to it helplessly. The old man had said very little; on the whole he had been wonderfully polite, but she knew she was trapped, and that she might as well try to fly as to escape from his watchful eye, his unscrupulous power.

And, after all, it was but a return to the old plans; so after a while she followed Lord Drummur's advice and dried her eyes.

"You ought to think yourself deuced lucky," growled Colonel Compton, when he came in, after a time full of alarm and recriminations. "If anyone had told me the old man would take it so quietly I wouldn't have be-

lieved it. I expected he would have kicked us both out into the gutter, and then where should we be? And such a mad idea, too! The Honourable Marmaduke Muir as a public dancer—preposterous!”

“It would only have been for six months and under an assumed name,” interrupted Fantine defiantly; but all initiative was passing from her. She felt like clay in the hands of the potter.

“Twaddle!” insisted Colonel Compton. “I can only think you were insane. The fact is, my dear Fanny, you’re getting old and your ankles wouldn’t stand the hacking about of a dancer’s life. That is why we agreed on your becoming Lady Drummuir, and you ought to be very much obliged to the old man for letting you off so easily.”

This, combined with the reiterated allusions to her age, was too much for patience. Fantine jumped up and stamped her foot in impotent anger.

“Easily?” she echoed. “Can’t you see the malice of the man? He is making us all feel fools. He is doing all the harm he can. I tell you he is enjoying himself thoroughly.”

She was perfectly right. Lord Drummuir had not felt so young for years. At that moment, after disposing of Penelope in a way that reached the very marrow of the unseen bones hidden under that extinguisher of fat, he was facing, with a special licence in his hand, the dapper little figure of the Reverend Patrick Bryce, who, called on some pretext of illness, found himself confronted with an order to solemnise a marriage that same evening.

The countenance of the small divine was a study in outraged dignity; that of Lord Drummuir one of super-

cilious toleration—the toleration of a cat for the unavailing efforts of a mouse to escape its paralysing captor.

“Am I to understand, sir, that you refuse to carry out this special licence at a perfectly appropriate time and place?” said the latter, his voice even but deliberate. “If so, I must ask you for your reasons in writing, that I may forward them with my complaint.” He waited a moment, then went on: “You were appointed by the Crown to this charge. A parishioner of yours in possession of a legal licence calls upon you to perform the duties of your office. You refuse, and I refuse to accept your refusal. That, I think, summarises the position between us. But let me remind you, my good sir, that nothing short of reliable information of cause or just impediment can justify a minister of the Church of Scotland in refusing to do the duty for which he is paid by the State. And if, sir, the licence of this house shocks you—as I am told it does—I think this endeavour of a man and a woman to keep within the bounds of so-called respectability should meet your approval. Briefly, my dear sir, you have not a leg to stand upon, and I demand your services at six o’clock this evening.”

The little minister rose and made him a courtly bow.

“It shall be as your lordship wishes; but I reserve to myself the right of showing to your lordship that special licences can be used for, as well as against, the Church.”

“Wonder where he gets his manners from,” commented Lord Drummair to himself, as the trim figure bowed itself out. “Father must have been someone’s valet, I suppose; and that reminds me of Marmaduke’s girl. She’s true blue, somehow.”

So he sat down, filled from top to toe with a wicked

elation at his own success in upsetting everybody's plans, and indited the following epistle to his son, as a sort of top note to his manœuvres :

“DEAR BOY,—You will be glad to hear that Fantine Le Grand becomes Lady Drummuir this evening at six o'clock. We have agreed that this is better than hunting two thousand pounds through the capitals of Europe, even in company with you. So that is settled. For the rest, I enclose a cheque for two thousand pounds on my bankers. You owe this to Marrion Paul, who is worth the whole batch of you put together. I cannot conceive how you were such a confounded ass as not to see this, but to let her slip through your fingers and leave the poor girl to face the insults of the neighbours, as she is doing ; for, of course, her escapade is the talk of the town. My dear Marmaduke, I am ashamed of you !—Your affectionate father, DRUMMUIR.

“Your step-mamma sends you her duty.”

He chuckled over the production which he calculated told enough to rouse anger and not enough to satisfy curiosity, and which, while being a regular facer, left the relations between them much as they were.

After which he had himself wheeled to the big hall where the ceremony was to take place, and amused himself vastly by superintending decorations and mystifying Peter, who came in from a day after wild duck, to find the house upside down. It was the sort of situation in which his lordship revelled, and he became almost lachrymose over reminiscences of the past with Jack Jardine, who never moved a muscle, but took the cere-

mony as a matter of course. Only when Peter, less experienced, asked him what the deuce the old man meant by playing the goat at a moment's notice, he shook his head solemnly, and replied—

“Your father is a very remarkable man, Peter, a very remarkable man indeed.”

So at the appointed hour the wheeled-chair took its place, its occupant duly bedecked with the white flower of a blameless life in his buttonhole, before the improvised sort of altar which bore on it a beautiful bunch of late roses; and the Reverend Patrick Bryce with a colour in his usually pale cheeks sailed in very stiff in his starched bands and rustling academical black robes and took his place before it. The bride, composed and cheerful, looking quite virginal in white and orange blossoms, appeared on the arm of Colonel Compton and followed by her bridesmaids, also in white. There were, however, but two of them, for Margaret Muir boldly stalked in separately, attired in a fine new purple gown, and took a place sedately beside Jack Jardine, who stared at her incredulously; for her father's eyes were upon her and scowling disapproval at her disobedience to his commands. She seemed quite indifferent to this, and nodded an encouraging smile to her sisters, who, poor souls, were the only people who showed by their red eyes and general emotion that the occasion was serious and not a mere farce.

So curtly, baldly, shorn of every unnecessary word, every touch of sentiment, the simple formula binding those two sinners in the most holy of bonds went swiftly on, until the Reverend Patrick Bryce closed the register in which Peter, as his father's best man, and Jack Jardine, as family friend, had duly attested the marriage, and

stepped down to where Lord Drummuir's chair stood with the new-made Lady Drummuir beside it.

"My part in this pitiable travesty being ended, sir," he said, with a dignified bow, "I take my leave. Before I do so, however, I wish to introduce my wife to you and acquaint you with my marriage—also by special licence—to your daughter. Margaret, my dear!" he added, raising his voice, "oblige me by saying farewell to your father. It is the last time you are likely to see him."

For a second the figure in the purple gown hesitated and gave an agonised glance at her sisters in white; then with her eyes fixed on the small dignified figure of the man to whom she had unreservedly given her whole large heart, her courage returned, she walked forward, her head held high, and faced her father. He was purple with rage, and looked as if he would have a fit.

"Do you mean to tell me," he stuttered, "that you have married that—that jackanapes?"

Her face flushed, her temper was up in a second, and matched his own.

"No, sir; I have married an honourable gentleman of birth equal to my own! It is more than you can say of your bride's——"

"Margaret, Margaret!" came the little parson's warning voice; for, be Lord Drummuir's faults what they may, he was still her father.

But she would have none of it, she was going to have her say for the first and last time of her life; so she went on while the old lord listened, a sort of wicked approval in his eyes. He had not known she was so much his daughter.

"And I married him without asking your consent,

because I knew you never would have given it, and I am of age——”

“Yes, my dear, a bit long in the tooth!” broke in the old man viciously.

“Very,” she replied; “but not so old a bride as you are a groom. I’m thirty-six, and, as you said yourself, if I choose to get married by special licence, provided there’s no cause or just impediment, no one—not even the nearest and dearest—have a right to object. Isn’t that what he said?” she added, in appeal.

The Reverend Patrick Bryce looked at his lordship and his lordship looked at him. Then suddenly came one of the rough, rude gaffaws.

“You’ve caught a tartar, parson!” chuckled the old man. “Take her, and be d——d to you both for a couple of fools. I’ll leave you to be angry, if you like; this is my wedding-day and I want to be jolly. Here, Davie—Davie Sim, where the devil are you with your pipes? Skirl up ‘Muir’s Matching.’ Now, my lady.”

And as the wheeled-chair moved off accompanied by white satin and orange blossoms he looked round to the purple robe with almost boyish malice in his eye.

“Take the parson’s arm and come along, Meg. You may as well get a good send off from the castle and have your share of the family wedding march, since it is little else you’ll be getting from the Muirs of Drummuir.”

That evening, after the newly made Lady Drummuir had been dismissed to her own rooms with the injunction to remember her new honours, and not to stand any cursed nonsense from any one, and the old man, regardless of gout, sat drinking one glass of port after another on the ground that, having got royally drunk at his three

previous weddings, he was not going to treat his fourth with less consideration—Jack Jardine, somewhat breathless after all the disturbing and inexplicable events of the day, shook his head and said once more—

“Your father is a remarkable man—a very remarkable man!”

“Very,” assented Peter. “Now I wonder what Marion Paul had to do with it all!”

CHAPTER XII

MARRION PAUL herself failed to answer that question. When she had returned at six o'clock to the castle—having spent the intervening time down by the seashore in order to avoid Penelope—she had been completely taken aback by the sudden development of affairs, wondering if she were in any way responsible for what had happened.

But a single look at the old lord's face, as he was wheeled in to take his place at the marriage ceremony, made her realise that the unwieldy body, instinct with malice and controlled by autocratic unassailable will, held every inmate of Drummuir Castle, herself included, as puppets in the hollow of its gouty hand.

A sudden unreasoning desire to get away from that influence, an extreme distaste at the part she had played in the serio-comic tragedy filled her. She envied the Reverend Patrick Bryce his independence, and it was with real relief that, according to her plan, she found herself once more rumbling to the Cross-keys in the chaise from the Crow.

This should be her last departure from the conventional. Now that Duke's safety from the dancing woman's wiles had been secured, she had time to blame for his supineness; and he, of course, when he heard of the marriage, was not likely to forgive her. Thus they were quits!

So be it. She could return to her dressmaking and never see him again. He had his majority, and, born soldier as he was, had his chance.

Not knowing, for certain, under what name Fantine Le Grand had engaged her room for the night, she was wary with the landlady of the Cross-keys and felt relieved when she was shown into a less pretentious room than the one she had been in the night before. Her vigil—and she knew it would be a long one ere the house was quiet enough to allow of her slipping down to the office to see if Marmaduke had written anything in the visitors' book—would have been harder in surroundings so full of keen memory. What a fool she had been! Why had she been so frank with him? The hot blood mounted to her very temples at the thought of it even while she felt angry with herself that it should be so. After all, she was not quite as the other *douce* country folk; there was something in her blood that was different; something that rebelled against the tyranny of that bloated old man, sitting like a spider in his web, imposing his wicked will upon all by sheer force of character.

Yet he had behaved well to her, and he was terribly, horribly like Duke.

So she sat raging, her head aching, till it was time to do the last bit of trickery, as it seemed to her now. Yet it must be done; for if Marmaduke had been indiscreet, Penelope, in her prying, which were certain, would be sure to find it out. It was not, however, till between two and three—that time when even the ostlers at an inn sleep—that it was safe for her to steal downstairs to the visitors' book. Even so, Boots lay snoring on a sofa in the office. But her task did not take long. There, as

she had foreseen, was Marmaduke's unmistakable writing in the words "Captain the Honourable and Mrs. Marmaduke Muir." Below, as if as witnesses, two commercial travellers had written their name and address. She had brought a sharp penknife with her, so, in less than a minute, the page was removed, the corresponding one in the quire pulled out, and the book closed again without trace of any removal. She gave a sigh of relief when she reached her bedroom again, and, folding up the written sheet, placed it in her purse. Then, after burning the other, she lay down and tried to sleep. But unsuccessfully, though she felt outwearied to an altogether unusual degree. The arrival of the early coach was a relief. She took her seat in it, hoping the fresh air would drive away her *malaise*; but it did not.

"You're no feelin' just the thing, miss," said a sympathetic bagman as he got out to stretch his legs at a change of horses. "Try just a wee sup of whisky; its awful inspirin'."

Marrion, smiling, shook her head. By this time she was beginning to wonder if, despite her usual hardiness, she had got a chill the night before.

It was past eight in the evening ere Edinburgh was reached, and, anxious to be housed as soon as possible, she left her box at the coach office and made her way giddily to her old lodgings where the landlady had agreed to keep her belongings until her return from her holiday. They were up a common stair that echoed and re-echoed to the slam of the street door and her own wavering steps. The rooms were high up and more than once Marrion had to pause for breath, and when at last she rang she had to lean against the door to recover herself.

There was no answer. She rang again and waited—waited an interminable time, until someone coming down the common stair said briefly—

“Ye’re wastin’ yer time, mum. Mistress McGillivray’s deid.”

“Dead !” she echoed feebly.

“Aye, last week, and the polis hae lockit up the place till the heirs be known,” replied the man, as he passed on, rousing the echoes again.

Marrion followed him, realising that she must seek another lodging. Easy in a way, yet difficult, since in that quarter of the old town many of the houses were not over-respectable. Still it was only for a night, and bed she must have as soon as possible. So she closed with an exorbitant offer in cash of a fairly clean attic made by a loose-lipped lady who smelt rather of whisky, and five minutes later, having locked herself in, threw herself, still half-dressed, on the truckle bed.

There the landlady next morning, having placidly unlocked the door with a master key, found her, flushed, breathless and delirious—briefly, down with a sharp attack of pneumonia. Infirmaries and district nurses being not as yet, Mother Gilchrist, as her *clientèle* called her, coolly took possession of her lodger’s purse, sent for an apothecary doctor from round the corner, and thereafter treated the patient with a certain amount of rough kindness, sending some of her other lodgers, girls with haggard faces and loose hair, to sit with her, and going up occasionally with water-gruel and still more watery beef-tea. But Marrion Paul was strong, and so, after a fortnight’s struggle in the valley, she came out of it wan and emaciated, and lay looking at a bit of torn paper

on the wall, that all through her fever dreams had flapped like a sail in a boat in which she and Duke were drifting out to sea, and wondering how much of what she remembered was true and how much dreams.

"I must get up," she said suddenly, when Mother Gilchrist appeared in company with water-gruel. "And will you give me my purse, please? I put it under my pillow, I think, but it isn't there."

Mother Gilchrist laughed a loose-lipped laugh and produced the purse from her pocket.

"Yon's the purse, my dearie; but there's naethin' in it the now. What wi' rent an' doctors an' physic, forby nursin', what else is to be expectit?"

Marmie stared aghast.

"But there was nigh ten pun' in till't," she protested.

"It's just awfie expensive bein' ill," replied Mother Gilchrist calmly. "Ye can hae the reckonin' later on. Meanwhile, tak yer nourishment like a good lammie."

"What's ten pun' to you one way or another," continued the exemplar of youth, when Marmie, up for the first time, returned to the charge. "You've gotten a paper in yon purse that's worth a guid deal tae you, my lass, if it's written in the man's own write—an' if ye can prove——"

Marrion interrupted her in an angry flash.

"You're making a mistake. It has nothing to do wi' me. An' I wouldn't prove if I could."

She paused, feeling she was contradicting herself.

"Lord sakes," retorted Mother Gilchrist, "ye needna loup down a body's throat! An', anyhow, a lassie wi' such hair as you've gotten needna look for ten pounds."

Marrion, still weakened body and soul by her illness, thought almost regretfully of her hairdresser.

"Aye," she assented languidly, "they'd give me that for it; but I should feel bad if it were cut off, shouldn't I?"

Mother Gilchrist burst into a cackling laugh.

"There's more ways, my lammie, o' makin' money by hair than by shearin' it off like a sheep's fleece," she said meaningly.

But the meaning did not come home to Marmie until one of the rather bedraggled girls in cheap finery let her into the secret of the house. They paid Mother Gilchrist a certain sum for board and lodging, and on the whole she was kind to them. Anyhow, they had to lump it, as most of them were in debt to her. However, there was always the chance of a stroke of luck, especially when one was new to the business and had such hair as Marrion had.

That same afternoon Marrion managed to creep round to the coach office. She intended to get her box and pawn some of her things—even the little brilliant brooch of her father's—so as to keep her in decent lodgings till she could find employment in some dressmaking concern. She would not go back to her old employers, for her address there was known and she wanted to lose herself; for a while at any rate.

But Fate was against her. Failing a claimant the box had been sent back whence it came, as the only address to be found on it was Drummuir Castle, Drum. Nor was her call at her old landlady's more successful. The flat was still locked up; so she came back utterly wearied and disheartened, to be met by a demand for more money

from Mother Gilchrist, who looked at her as one looks at a rat caught in a trap. She had miscalculated with Marrion, however; and in an instant the latter made up her mind. She must get out of the present quagmire without delay. Yet she did not wish to make herself known to the friends she had in Edinburgh, because during the past fortnight her desire to lose herself—to get away once and for all from Drummuir and all that Drummuir entailed—aye, even Duke—had been strengthening. But she could sell her hair. Mother Gilchrist, arguing from other girls, was calculating she would not; but she would find she was mistaken. She might think it safe enough to let a girl without a penny in her pocket go out alone, but she would find herself wrong.

That night Marrion slept the sleep of the just, and it was one o'clock—for the gun had just fired from the castle—next day when, with a curiously light heart, she walked out of the most fashionable hairdresser's shop in Prince's Street. She had eschewed her old admirer's for obvious reasons, but she had found no difficulty in her bargain; and if her heart was light, her purse was heavy. She was free, at any rate, of Mother Gilchrist and her kind; she was free also of any necessity for recalling the past. She would make her own future in life.

As she passed through the shop heavily veiled, for she would run no risk of recognition, a group of fashionably dressed young men were daffing over *pommade hongroise* with an attractive young person behind the counter, but they took no notice of the somewhat shabbily dressed figure which passed out and went westward. With money in her pocket Marrion's plans began to formulate rapidly. She would not stop in Edinburgh;

she would go to some place where the fear of recognition would not constantly be with her. So she would go—whither?

She pondered the question idly, heedless of Fate behind her in the shape of one of those fashionably dressed young men, who, two minutes after Marrion had passed through the shop, had burst out after her, leaving his companions still looking with admiration at a great pile of red-brown hair which the proprietor of the shop, hugely delighted with his bargain, had brought in for these privileged customers to see.

So she had not long for freedom. Ere she had reached Frederick Street a detaining hand was on her arm and a joyous voice in her ears—

“Marmie! I knew it must be you! I have been looking for you everywhere.”

“Duke,” she said feebly as she looked round. And as she did so, the distant Calton Hill blocking the blue slopes of Arthur’s Seat, the wonderful blending of town and country which makes Edinburgh seem an epitome of human life, was lost to her eyes; she only saw his face, *insouciant*, smiling, yet full of affection. The douce commonsensical world in which she had resolved to live was gone; she was among the stars again, in a different existence, herself a different being. Yet even as she realised this she realised that she was alone. He had not found his wings to follow her.

Yet he was prompt; without pause he hailed a passing cab, put her into it unresisting, gave the order Pentland Hotel, and as he seated himself beside her reached out a hand with glad delight in the clasp of its warm fingers to find her own.

"Where are we going, Duke?" she asked, with a sort of sob in her effort to keep herself to normal.

"To have lunch, my dear!" he replied joyously. "You look as if you wanted it. And we haven't much time to spare, for the train starts for Glasgow at 2.30 and we must go by it, for my leave is up and I have to get back to Ayr by to-morrow. I'm in command of the detachment there."

The certitude of his words roused instant resentment.

"I must ask you to excuse me," she said peremptorily. "Will you stop the cab, Captain Muir?"

"But, my dear," he replied, quite pathetically, "I must speak to you somehow, and this is my only chance. Do come, Marmie, at any rate, to lunch."

The simplicity of his plea disarmed her again, and the hotel being reached at that moment she allowed him to take her on his arm up the steps after the fashion of the day. But once in the private sitting-room, which, with lunch for two as quick as possible, he had commanded in a lordly voice as he entered, his manner changed again.

"Take off that veil and bonnet, will you, please," he said abruptly. "I want to see what that brute has dared to do."

Marrion looked at him startled.

"Oh, yes," he continued, "I know! That's how I found you. When the man brought in that pile of hair to show those young cubs—faugh! it makes me sick to think of them fingering it—I knew it must be yours; no one else has hair like it. Marmie! Marmie! why did you let him do it—the grovelling, money-grubbing beast!"

Once again his anger appeased her, and she replied :

"I wanted the money."

He groaned.

"And you got me the two thousand pounds ! Oh ! yes, the old man—curse him !—told me all about it, and how that harridan Penelope—— But never mind that now, though, you see, we have plenty to talk about. When——"

She had removed her bonnet and now stood a trifle defiant.

"It will grow again !"

But he had passed from his vexation.

"Why, Marmie, surely you've been ill ? You are so thin, so pale, child—what has been the matter ?" he exclaimed, all his innate kindness coming uppermost. "Here, sit down ; you look as if you were going to faint"—he rang the bell violently. "I don't believe you've had anything to eat ! Here ! Tell the housekeeper to send up a cup of soup—beef-tea, if she has got it—at once, and—and some toast," he called out loudly, after the retreating waiter. Then he came to stand by Mar-
rion and say in an almost tragic voice, "I owe you a lot, Marrion Paul, and I'm going to pay it back, by gad ! I am !"

She tried to laugh and failed, feeling she would cry if she spoke. So she took her soup when it came and afterwards, as he eat his lunch, they talked and argued.

"Now look here, my dear," he said at last in his old, rather flamboyant, most masterful manner, "you tell me you don't want to stop in Edinburgh, and you tell me you have plenty of money in your purse. But one thing you haven't got at present—strength to work. I can see

you haven't, and you have done an immense amount for me, and—well, I'm dashed if I am going to leave you as you are to face things alone. So that settles it. I must get back to Glasgow now. You come with me so far. I promise you, Marmie, I will not—well, annoy you in any way. See a doctor, and—and do as you like. Only I swear to you, my dear, if you won't be reasonable I'll break my leave and stop here, and—and——”

His boyish face broke into mischief; he came towards her with hands outstretched, frank, absolutely devoid of all save pure affection.

In a way, it cut her to the heart as she acquiesced.

The ride to Glasgow, first-class, with all the alacrity of guards and porters consequent on Marmaduke's lordly ways and tips, was rather an agreeable novelty; so also was the obsequiousness of the hotel where he left her, saying he would be round to see her ere he started for Ayr next morning.

Before he came, however, a rather well-known doctor arrived somewhat to her annoyance, the more so because his verdict was startling. A sharp attack of pneumonia, which mercifully had not killed her, had left both lungs enfeebled. At least six weeks' complete rest, care, and good food, and, if possible, sea air would be necessary to make them normal; but given these desiderata perfect recovery was assured.

Six weeks! Marrion, despite her full purse, was aghast, and Marmaduke, coming in with his usual breezy vitality, found her depressed. He was in uniform, and it was the first time she had seen him so, with all the accessories, as it were, of his young manhood about him, from the glitter of his plaid brooch to the pipe-clay on

his white gaiters, for Andrew Fraser would have scorned to have aught astray in his master's kit.

"I have had rather bad news," she began dolefully; but he checked her with a comprehending smile.

"I know," he replied, ' I was waiting for the pill-doc's verdict downstairs. But it's perfectly easy, my dear. The sea is simply splendid at Ayr. I'm off there in quarter of an hour; but I'm going to leave Andrew Fraser here to bring you down later on. If I can't find you a suitable lodging before you come you can get one for yourself next day. And if you do run short of money, you can always come to me, can't you?"

She shook her head, but the tears were in her eyes.

CHAPTER XIII

ANDREW FRASER stood at attention watching a couple of figures, a man and a woman, who for the last hour had been dredging a sea-pool with a landing net as if they were boy and girl. He had watched them at it often in the last six weeks, and, honest, straight-forward fellow as he was, had wondered how they managed to treat each other with such perfect unconsciousness that they were man and woman. So far as his master was concerned, that might be, for Andrew was shrewd enough to see the difference between friendship and passion; but, if anyone was ever heart-wholly in love, Marrion Paul was that person. You could see it in her face; yet it never seemed to influence her actions. The perception of this made Andrew vaguely afraid of her; it put a sort of damper on his own passion for her, since such self-control was not natural; it was barely human.

Hour after hour, the simple soul would tell himself, those two would play themselves like a couple of weans. Three or four times a week the major would, after the morning parades were over, drive out in his tilbury—Andrew perched in the tiny back seat—and spend his afternoon at the little inn which was also the ferry-house over the Doon river where Marrion lodged. Sometimes the two would go out sailing together, but more often

they amused themselves on the shore, as they were doing now, dredging for sea things or catching miller's thumbs. It was childish, but — Andrew's lean, anxious face puckered with confused thought as he turned to a sound which he knew would bring with it a more common-sensical outlook on the situation than he, with his passionate love for the woman concerned, his passionate affection for the man, could bring to bear on it. It was the click of busy knitting needles, and they belonged to the landlady of the "Plough." She was a thoroughly good, kindly, healthy woman, whose views were strictly conventional on all subjects appertaining to the relations between the sexes; and as these in those days—and even now, for the most part—were that sex was the only possible tie between two spirits if they happened to be living for the time being, one in a male body, the other in a female—they were not likely to approve of the dredgers of sea-treasures.

"When are yon two gaun to be marriety?" she asked firmly. She was a just woman, and having seen no signs of wrong-doing was willing to believe the best.

Andrew hesitated.

"I'm thinkin'," he replied slowly, "that they are no considering marriage."

"Then they aught tae think shame tae themselves," retorted the landlady severely. "Her week's up the morrow's morn, an' I'll just tell her she canna stop in my house. It's just clean redeeklus."

Andrew flushed up.

"There's no need for you to say aught, ma'am," he protested eagerly. "She's leavin', anyhow. Ye ken she only came for her health and that's re-established. It

would only hurt the lassie—and—and do harm, mayhap."

The landlady looked at him and sniffed.

"The lassie, as you ca' her—will take no hairm from what I sall say to her, an' she'd be the better to give up moithering about wi' majors, and tak' up wi' a gude, God-fearin' man like yersel'."

And with that she carried the click of her knitting-pins back into the inn, leaving Andrew Fraser battling with his own heart. Aye, surely, surely, it would be better, more seemly, more discreet.

But there they were coming up from the beach like happy children.

"Then I'll bring a boat along at one to-morrow," said the major, as he climbed into the tilbury. "I can't get away before, and we'll try and get to the Craig. It's eighteen miles south, so if this north-west wind holds good we shall have plenty of time, shan't we?"

"Plenty of time!" echoed Marrion happily.

But she had been happy every day of those six weeks, and even now, though the hair money was running short, and she knew she must be up and doing in a few days, she would not, could not, think of the future. Sufficient to the day was the evil and the good thereof.

Half an hour after Marmaduke's departure, however, she came out of the inn-parlour with a heightened colour. It had been no use attempting to explain the position to the landlady, it was foolish to mind what she had said; the more so as, automatically, that position must end in a day or two; still it was disturbing!

In this early September the twilights were long and the sky was still golden high up to the zenith. She threw

a shawl over her head and, taking a boat, sculled herself across the ferry for a calming walk down the coast-line.

“The banks and braes of bonny Doon!”

The song kept echoing in her head. How pinchbeck it all was, that love of which men sung—

“But my false lover stole the rose,
But, ah, he left the thorn wi’ me!”

That was a man’s view of it. He came, he saw, he conquered. Then he could ride away leaving a thorn behind him. But why? She laughed aloud as she thought of her own passionate love for Duke, a love nothing could touch, a love that was unsoilable, unassailable, untouchable!

It was dark ere she returned and then someone tall and soldierly rose out of the shadows of the little sitting-room of the inn which she used as her own. For an instant her heart leapt. Then she saw it was Andrew Fraser.

“There’s nothing wrong, is there?” she asked hastily.

“I’m no that sure,” he replied unsteadily, and then his outstretched hands found hers, warm almost compelling in their fierce yet tender clasp.

“Marrion, Marrion, my dear,” he said hoarsely, “ye’re bringing wae into yure life! Oh, dinna draw away frae me, I’m not come to tell ye I love you; *that’s* sure! You know that, Marrion, if you know anything. But listen! You cou’dna marry me. That’s sure, too; d’ye think I can’t feel that, too, Marrion? Right through to the very cauld core o’ my heart, an’ it’s cauld, Marrion—it’s deathly cauld!” He paused, and the girl in his passionate hold shivered.

"It makes me cauld, too, Andry," she half-sobbed, "deathly cauld. You're maybe worth more than he is, but—but I canna help myself."

Andrew's voice grew firmer.

"An' I canna help it either, my dear. But if ye canna marry me, why sou'd you not marry him?"

She shook her head. "I willna tie him down," she interrupted hoarsely. "I willna do him harm!"

"It's no harm!" he urged. "See you, lassie; would ye rather hae a Lord Drummuir wi' a wife like yersel', or a Lord Drummuir like to the auld man at the Castle now? I'm no sayin', mind you, that he wad be just as his father, but—well, I hae lived wi' the major these eight years, and I ken fine he needs a guide—why, my dear, since ye cam here, he's away to his bed like a lad to sleep like a child; an' there's a play-actin' woman at the theaytre in Glasgi' that had laid hands on him and thocht she'd got him; but he's just escapit the snare like a bird from a fowler. Sae ye might do good, not harm."

There was a pause.

"Ye mean well, Andry," she said softly, "but—but he hasn't really asked me to—to marry him."

Andrew turned aside wearily.

"Has he no?" he replied. "Weel, that may be your fault, lassie; ye can keep a man at arm's length wi' a smilin' face, as I know tae my cost."

A sudden realisation of the man's self-sacrificing devotion came to her.

"An' ye've come to tell me this," she almost whispered, "to tell me to your cost! Oh, Andry, Andry, yere love is greater than mine!"

A sort of half sob came from the darkness.

"God bless ye for that, Marrion—God bless ye for that, my dear!"

The scalding tears were in her eyes as she raised them from her hiding hands to look for him; but he had gone. The shadows were empty.

The morning rose still and serene save for the puffing of the westerly wind that ruffled the blue sea with tiny white-crested waves. The Ayrshire coast stretching south lay green and yellow with ripe corn in little bays and promontories—far away like a faint cloud the cliffs of Ailsa Craig showed almost translucent.

An ideal day indeed for a sail!

Marrion, her mind still disturbed by her landlady's half-threatening remonstrances and by Andrew's pathetic appeal to the same conventional outlook, turned with relief to the prospect of her afternoon's holiday; probably the last one she would have, since she had made up her mind to leave for work next day.

It was a good deal past one when Marmaduke, in rather an evil temper, ran the pleasure-boat into the little pier where she was ready waiting. He looked less buoyant than usual and apologised for being late. All the fishing fleet were out, he said, and he had waited in vain to get a man.

"Not that that matters!" he added, recovering himself, as he helped her in. "You are as good as a man any day, Marmie."

And yet, when, after a three hours' sail before the wind, they reached the Craig, and, mooring the boat, climbed to the westering cliffs beneath which the waves set a frill of white lace, he fairly startled her by saying suddenly:

“Marmie, I’ve made up my mind; I am going to marry you. I’ve thought over everything from start to finish, and I’m certain it is the best thing for both of us. Now, my dear girl, let me have my say for once; you shall have yours by-and-by. I’m not going to talk of what you did for me with my father. I’m not sure yet, you see, whether I am vexed or grateful. A man doesn’t like to be exactly—well—herded; but you did it; and that intolerable vixen Penelope—but I won’t talk about her either. Then there’s the hair business,” he eyed her ruefully, though in truth, now that the ends began to curl, the shearing was no such dis-sight, “that also was my fault; and now”—he paused, and a red flush of anger rose to his brow—“the goody-goodies in Ayr apparently won’t let you alone, and one of the youngsters this morning tried to cut a joke; but I won’t talk of that either. The long and short of it is, Marmie, that you and I have got to get married. And”—his voice changed to almost affection—“you know, dear, what you stand for with me—for everything that I know to be really worth having—everything that—well—I ought to be and am not. For it’s the old story, Marmie, I’m Tristram Shandy and you are the Shorter Catechism, so—so come and help me, won’t you?”

With his voice in her ears she sat for a moment looking out westwards. A low bank of cloud had obscured the horizon, the sun just thinking of sinking behind it shone with unearthly brilliance over the sea, over him, over herself. Then she disengaged her hand from his gently, and, rising, stood on the extreme verge of the cliff, looking down into the dazzling, shifting green of the waves. Would it, after all, be so great a plunge downwards?

She had often imagined the choice coming to her. Suddenly she spoke :

"There is no need for—for Tristram Shandy to be—to be bound up with the Shorter Catechism, is there? The two could help each other without the binding, couldn't they? And then"—her voice had the break of half-tears, half-laughter in it—"you see Tristram Shandy would be free—free to marry." She had been so intent on her own words, her eyes looking out far beyond that dark horizon that she had not realised he had risen to stand beside her; but now his arm about her waist, his face bent caressingly to hers, quite upset her self-control, she turned with a sob and buried her face on his breast. "Oh, Duke, Duke!" she cried. "I mustn't, I daren't harm you!"

He held her to him and kissed her again and again.

"You won't harm me," he said exultantly. "Of course I shan't be able to noise our marriage abroad just now, so you will have plenty of time to prepare for your future position."

All the glamour, all the glitter seemed gone from the world; she drew herself away from him and smiled at him tenderly, feeling glad that he had failed apparently to realise the magnitude of her offer.

"You must give me time to think, Duke," she said.

He looked a little offended.

"Oh, take it, by all means; only if you won't marry me we must give up being friends, for I'm not such a cad as to let a girl like you lose her character over me—but I expect I shall go to the devil, all the same."

They were very silent when they set sail once more

They had intended to tack along the coast to a village where Andrew had been told to await them with the tilbury; but after one or two attempts to make way against a momentarily increasing wind, Marmaduke, with a rapid glance at that arc of black cloud which had by now overcast the zenith, remarked briefly:—

“We are in for it, I fear, and had better run for Girvan. Wait till I am ready, Marmie, then take her round sharp.”

Even as he spoke the gust of a coming squall struck them, the boat heeled over, and but for skill both at tiller and sheet, might have overset.

“It’s a mercy you can steer,” he said, a minute or two later, as by a deft giving way the boat over-rode a following seventh wave; “but if you keep your head there’s no harm done.”

So they flew before the rapidly rising gale, which, as it rose, shifted from north-west to nor'-nor'-by-west and threatened to drive them down the coast.

“We shall have to tack to make Girvan,” he said sharply, “and it’s best to do it before the full fury of the storm touches us. It looks ugly out there.”

Marmie nodded.

“I’ll take my time from you,” she replied, “but don’t hurry; we shall get into a slacker bit in a minute or two.”

“Now!” came his voice.

The helm went round with all her young strength, but the boat hung for a second, a following wave took her broadside on, there was a crash, and Marmaduke was overboard. For one dreadful second Marrion’s heart stood still; the next she realised he had still the

sheet-rope in his hand, and, bringing the boat up sideways to him, he had his hand on the gunwale and was clambering in.

"That was a narrow shave," he said, with a brilliant smile. "Now, Marmie, as the yard has gone, there's nothing for it but let the sail fill as it can or can't. It will steady us, anyhow. So I'll tie the sheet and take the tiller. You'd better sit at my feet—see, here's my coat—rubbish, put it on, I tell you! I don't think we shall make Girvan, but I—I think I can run her ashore further down. If not——" He stooped and kissed her.

That was all; but whether the next hour was a nightmare or a heavenly dream Marrion Paul in after years never could decide. The great waves rushing past the little boat, the half-dismasted sail bellying out over the uplifted bows, scarce seen in the gathering darkness, their figures in the stern, close—ah! so close together, she resting against his knees, with upturned face on his, one arm round his waist, the other, round his feet sheltering him as best she could with the coat he had insisted on her taking. And he? He seemed to her as the archangel Michael might have seemed, as he sat courageous, alert, bending down once or twice, after a stiffer struggle, to touch her hair with his lips, and almost laugh his confidence.

"Getting along nicely, Marmie. We may have to swim for it—but it has got to be done!"

At last there came a roar ahead of breakers on a beach.

"It's sand, I think, so off with your boots and everything else you can!" he called above the roar. "No,

don't—ah, thank you, now I can kick them off! Be ready, child, and hold on to me. We sink or swim together!"

So she stood beside him for a minute or two, her skirts thrown aside, her bare arms ready for a forward drive. Then came a faint grating, a shock as the boat, heeled round by his strong arm, struck broadside on on the sand and pitched them forward nearer the land into the breakers. There was a terrific back draw, and Marrion felt as if her arms would be torn out of the sockets; but Marmaduke's grip upon her was as iron; then he was on his feet, then, with a cry—

"Run—run for all you're worth!" He half-dragged her beyond the whole awful onslaught of the sea. Another wild struggle, another forward run, and they were safe on the sandy shore, with low moorland around them. Then for the first time he began, manlike, to fuss over discomfort.

"You must get out of this as soon as may be," he exclaimed, as they stood in the full blast of the biting wind. "I see a light over yonder. Let's run for it, it will keep you warm."

He held out his hand and together they ran, the bruised leaves of the bog myrtle as they sped over the moor sending their clean aromatic odour into the night air.

"Better than last time," he said, with a laugh. "By Jove, I did get deep into the bog that time! It's better in couples."

So, once again those two, caught by the glamour of pure life, raced on almost forgetful of past danger and present discomfort.

The light proved to be from a shepherd's hut, where

they found warmth and shelter, a sup of porridge, and some milk. It was four good miles to Girvan by a bad road, and that made a retreat thither impossible in the teeth of such a furious gale as was now raging; so the old shepherd, after providing Marrion with a petticoat of his dead wife's and a plaid of his own, proposed to retreat to an outhouse and leave the cottage to his uninvited guests. Marmaduke, however, negatived the proposal. His wife, he said, would be the better of a good sleep, while he must be off at daybreak to Girvan in order to get a conveyance; so she could lie down in the bed-place and he and the shepherd could just snooze by the fire. Which they did.

Marrion, wide awake at first, her nerves all athrill, listened to their even voices for a time, then watched them asleep in their chairs, the firelight on their placid faces, and finally fell asleep herself, to wake with bright sunlight streaming into the little cottage.

A scribbled note in pencil awaited her from Marmaduke. He might be away some time; she was not to expect him till she saw him.

It was early afternoon when he did return in an open chaise and four with postillions.

"The road is very bad," he explained airily, "and I've brought you some clothes. You'd better go and put them on, as we ought to start at once."

"You ought not——" she began hastily at her first glance at the milliner's box. "You really——"

"My dear girl," he replied, with a charming smile, "mayn't I see you dressed for once as you ought to be dressed!"

There was no alternative with the postillions waiting,

and as she put on the things he had brought she was forced into admitting he had good taste.

"You do look nice!" he cried, joyous as a child, as he handed her into the chaise.

The next instant they were off, the grey horses with their red-coated postillions lending quite a bridal appearance to the couple behind them, for Marmaduke was also very spruce, though he was wearing his left hand tucked into the roll collar of his coat. Something in the look of the arm, now she had time for observation, made Marion say suddenly—

"You hurt yourself?"

He nodded.

"Dislocated my wrist—you see that first wave was an awful jerk. So I had to get back to the regimental surgeon to get it sorted and get my three days' leave."

She looked at him startled.

"What for?" she asked quickly.

"For our honeymoon, dear," he replied, his kindly, handsome affectionate face bent close to hers. "Don't look so alarmed, Marmie, it had to be after what you and I went through together yesterday; we can't get away from each other, even if we would."

"But——" she began.

At that instant the cross road on which they had been merged into a turnpike, and with a swerve the grey horses turned to the right.

"But me no buts!" he cried gaily. "We are on the south road, not the north." Then he suddenly grew grave. "And God bless you, dear, for all you've done for me and will do for me in the years to come!"

That turn south had brought them face to face with the

glorious line of coast fading away into a golden mist. Far out on the wide expanse of sea the same soft September mist lay like a veil, hiding—what?

Marrion Paul, sitting hand-in-hand with the one love of her life, did not even ask the question; for all things, everything, seemed swallowed up in a golden glory.

Marmaduke's voice roused her, joyous, confident.

"And I've got a wedding present for you. I wouldn't give it you before. You see you are such a wilful customer, I was afraid you mightn't get into the chaise."

Half-mechanically she opened the case he laid on her lap. It contained two very long, very thick plaits of red-brown hair, each held together by an entwined monogram of M's in brilliants. She looked at him and he looked at her in affectionate raillery.

"Now!" he cried joyously. "You'll be fit to be seen. You didn't think, did you, I was going to let your hair be appraised by those young fools? So that day we left Edinburgh—you remember I nearly missed the train—I raced back to that beast of a hairdresser. I didn't know till then, Marmie, it was so valuable; but it was well worth it. Then I had it set." He paused, aware of some jarring note, and added, "You do like it, dear, don't you?"

Marrion, sitting with her long coils of hair in her lap, felt somehow that the glamour had gone from the gold of earth and sky.

"Of course I like it," she said, making an effort, "but—but why the diamonds?"

He laughed.

"Because I like diamonds and I like you to look well.

I—I suppose you couldn't twist 'em up somehow now, could you? The postillions won't see."

She removed her bonnet and deftly coiled the long plaits about her shapely head.

"I'm afraid it's not very neat," she said solidly.

But he was more than satisfied.

"You look divine!" he cried exultantly. "More like other people, you know; and I dare say it is mean of me, but your close crop always made me feel bad, because you know I was really the cause of it. So now we start fair, don't we?"

"Quite fair," she answered, with a smile. He was such a child. Yet some of the glamour had gone.

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

"MR. PETER MUIR wishes to know if he can see you, ma'am," said the servant.

The woman seated at a table by the window in the small drawing-room of a tiny house in one of the back streets of Belgravia laid down her work and rose. It was Marrion Paul; but she was seven years older and neither face nor figure had quite the same buoyant youthfulness. Indeed, as she crossed to the fireplace a distinct limp was apparent. Still her face had gained in beauty, and the masses of her red bronze hair glinted bright as ever. Those seven years of life had been hard in some ways; but they had been happy in others—happy most of all in that Marmaduke Muir was well and content.

Marrion drew an easy-chair to the fire and closed the window, knowing her visitor to be chilly. She did the latter with reluctance, for the late November sunshine shone golden in the narrow street, and the somewhat mews-laden atmosphere of those back purlieus of fashionable houses was sweetened as it filtered through the wide boxes of trailing musk which made the little house with the brass plate bearing its legend,

MRS. MARSDEN

Layettes

look quite countrified and summerlike.

Peter Muir, coming in languidly, complaining of the cold, slipped into the easy-chair as one accustomed to it.

He also was older, his weak face showed signs of recent ill-health; but he was otherwise the loose knit, errant, yet dandified figure he had been. Dressed in the height of the fashion, his blue-and-white bird's eye bow and stiff stand up collar seemed the most striking parts of his personality.

"This place is the only peaceful spot in all the town," he sighed. "I often wish I were back in the little room upstairs where you nursed me so patiently."

"And your brother, Major Marmaduke," she put in kindly, "don't forget him, Mr. Peter. If it hadn't been for him, I don't believe you would have lived."

Peter Muir fingered his nails nervously.

"No, I don't suppose I should. You see, it was all Vienna. It's the devil of a place for a young fellow, especially if he has got no money—and we never have any, have we? But that is really the reason why I've dropped in to have a quiet talk with you, so I thought I would come in the morning, in case Marmaduke——"

"I haven't seen your brother for ten days," she interrupted quietly. "I believe he has been away hunting in Hampshire, hasn't he?"

Peter Muir went on fingering his nails.

"Yes," he said at last, "part of the time." Then he suddenly burst out—"I don't know why we should beat about the bush, you and I. You were a perfect Providence to me, Marmie; I used to call you that, you know, when I was so ill and the doctors swore that D.T. must end in an asylum. Duke means a lot to both of us, doesn't he? And it's about him I want to speak. You've noticed, of course, that he is hipped and out of spirits, haven't you?"

"No one could help noticing that," she replied coldly.

"And he says it is because the old man of the sea at the Castle won't give him the money to purchase the colonel's step, I suppose?" asked the young man tentatively.

"That is the case, I believe," she replied, even more coldly. "There was the same difficulty about the majority."

Peter Muir laughed and looked at her quizzically.

"I've often wondered how that was done," he said. "But this time it isn't quite fair on the baron. To give the devil his due, I believe he is quite ready to fork out the money if Marmaduke will only promise to marry within the year. You see the question of succession is becoming acute. There is no chance of an heir to the barony from Pitt. And I—I—well, let's out with it! I've dished myself with the peer as well as with Providence. It's my damned own fault, of course, but there it is. And it isn't as if there was not a real picture man in the family whose sons should do credit to the Castle."

He had run on rapidly, and now paused to look at his companion.

"And does the Major refuse to accept the conditions?" she asked quietly. "I wonder why?"

Peter Muir felt distinctly injured by her calm.

"So do I, and I was wondering if——"

She stopped him with a gesture of her hand, which sent all his conventional decorum to the right-about, and left him, a man, before her a woman—left him, instead of an elaborate detective, a reluctant admirer.

"Mr. Peter," she said, smiling, "don't wonder! It is very kind of you to come and tell me the truth—kind

also to try and find me out; but, believe me, I do not stand in your brother's way. It is two years since Major Muir first brought you here to me, a milliner living by her work only. All that while he and I have been good friends—nothing more. I had no claim to be anything else. Does that satisfy you?"

Peter Muir held out a hot, damp, but enthusiastic hand to meet her cool, wholesome one.

"I'm not quite sure if it does," he said, in a manner suddenly and to her painfully reminiscent of Marmaduke. "You've been a good sight more to him than any friend has been to me, worse luck! Perhaps if I had had someone like you in a peaceful little room like this—but Marmaduke always had the devil's own luck. However, you are not angry, are you? Only I thought it right to put you up to the ropes in case——"

"There is no in case about it," she interrupted quickly. "I—I make no claim." She rose, passed to the window, and looked out. "Has Lord Drummuir any—any special selection for his future daughter-in-law?" she asked, and the young man at the fireplace jiggled the seals in his pocket amusedly.

He knew a thing or two, he imagined, about women.

"Not so far as I am aware of, at *present*," he replied, negligently; "but the consent is a trifle urgent, for the colonelcy will be going ere long. He ought to make up his mind soon and come with me to a roaring New Year at the Castle—it's always a bachelor party—and it may be his last chance. So, if you could say a word or two—you have more influence over Marmaduke——"

She flashed round suddenly.

"I used to have some," she corrected. "However,

thanks very many. Now let us talk of something else."

After her visitor had gone Marrion Paul, who called herself Mrs. Marsden on the door-plate, threw the window wide with an air of relief and sat down once more to her work. It was an infant's cap of almost incredibly fine stitchings and embroideries; the kind of cap which, perched on slender, white, much-beringed hands would give tremors of delightful anticipation to rich young wives awaiting motherhood. On the table were strewn other tiny habiliments dainty and delicate beyond compare; for Mrs. Marsden's layettes were renowned. Nothing crude, nothing out of place came from her skilful hands; all things bore the indefinable stamp of absorbing care and almost divine hope that the little unknown atom of life to come should have garments worthy of its mission.

The truth being that, as she worked, her mind always held at the back of it the memory of a certain box upstairs in which lay the first baby clothes she had ever made—clothes laboured at day by day in a perfect heaven of happiness for her child and Duke's, the poor little dear which had lost its life in the effort to save hers after that terrible accident.

It had not been Duke's fault, though he had reproached himself bitterly at first; but that had been more because of her consequent lameness. For to a man a dead baby does not count for much—not even if no other follows it—at least not to a man like Marmaduke, so light-hearted, so affectionate, so free from all carping cares and thoughts.

No, it had been her fault from the beginning. She

should have held her own as she had done for his good in so many other ways before and since. And now, after these years of freedom, was the tie between them—the unreal tie which ought never to have existed—to hold him back from taking his rightful place in life?

Suddenly she folded up the tiny cap, putting it by with a wistful little smile and a pat against happier thoughts, went upstairs, put on her bonnet, and, leaving word she would not be back till late, passed out into the street. One thing was certain, she must avoid seeing Marmaduke until her mind was indelibly fixed, and there was always a chance he might drop in to see her.

London in those days was a dreary spot for anyone requiring a quiet place wherein to look Fate in the face; but Marrion knew her way to two places where she could secure peace and quiet—the National Gallery and the reading-room of the British Museum. She had often spent long hours in the former, not moving from place to place, but seated before some masterpiece, scarce seeing it, yet vaguely learning something from it which had been missing in her life; but to-day she chose the latter, as being farther away, and it was time she wished to kill—time in which it was possible to hear the familiar step on the stairs, perhaps to be greeted by some affectionate jest that stockings were not mended or that new handkerchiefs required marking. She smiled as she thought of those seven long years during which she had kept this man as comfortable and as tidy as she could, during which she had managed for him as well as any woman could have managed, and tried to imagine the estimation in which such devotion would be held by the wives and mothers for whose infants she worked. She

was a constant reader at the Museum, having, when she came to London, set herself deliberately to gain what she had perforce missed in her life, so she found a place, sent in her slip for a book, and was soon apparently studying it. But she was not even thinking. In the great crises of life one does not weigh pros and cons; decision comes from outside to those who recognise that there is something beyond one's own individual life. It is those who do not see, who fail to recognise the spiritual plane, who cannot distinguish good from evil, evil from good, who err past forgiveness. And from the moment Marrion Paul had heard of the condition on which old Lord Drummuir would buy the colonelcy she had known she must face him again. The only question was when, and how.

The sooner the better. She would inquire about the journey on her way home.

It was dark ere she arrived there with a long list of startings and arrivals in her hand, and a new sense of elation in her heart—the elation of the born fighter at yet another chance of battle.

“The Major was here asking for you, ma’am, about five o’clock,” said the maidservant, “and he said if you could let him have two or three white ties to-night he would be obliged, as he is going into the country early to-morrow.”

Marrion laughed. So much the better for her plans.

“Take a hot iron to the dining-room,” she said, “and set the lace-board. You can take the ties round to his lodgings after supper.”

CHAPTER II

SEVEN years had not improved old Lord Drummuir's temper, neither had it softened the arrogance of his sway over the household. Marrion realised this in a second, as, entering the study under the name of Mrs. Marsden—a lady who, according to the footman, was—"Oh, yes, sir, quite young, and yes, sir, quite good-looking!" and who had private business with his lordship, she found herself instantly recognised by three pairs of eyes. One the occupant of the familiar wheel-chair, the others those of my lady and Penelope. The sight of the latter was unexpected, for though Marrion knew her grandfather had died the previous year she had not heard of Penelope's reinstallation as confidential attendant to my lady. It was not an arrangement likely to occur to anyone out of Drummuir Castle; but there all things were possible.

In the instant's pause which followed on her entrance Marrion had time to note that the old man had changed but little. His face had lost somewhat of its colour, but the look of absolute domineering power was strong as ever. My lady had grown stout—the very idea of a *tandango* was far from her now—and the colour had come to her face in unbecoming fashion. Penelope, on the other hand, had grown thinner, and in her black dress looked prim propriety.

"Well, young woman?" began his lordship.

It was a signal for indignant protest from those two.

"Drummuir," shrilled the lady, "if you speak to that creature I must leave the room!"

Penelope's answering assent was audible in a snort.

The old man fixed them with a stony stare.

"I was just about to ask you to do so, my dear," he said, with suave politeness. "Penelope, open the door for your mistress."

Marrion, as mechanically she stepped aside towards the window to let them pass out, felt that nothing was altered. The spider was master of his web still, every stick and stone of the old place existed by this old man's wicked will. And it was this heritage she had set herself to gain for the man she loved! A spasm of repugnance shot through her.

Yet surely the place itself was glorious. Her glance speeding northwards took in the same old familiar view that had been visible from her window in the keep-house; the grey northern sea trending away, round promontory and point, the cliffs looking so strangely red compared with the white hills, the white moors—for snow lay thick everywhere. In those long years of London life she seemed to have forgotten that snow could be so white. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow." The words recurred to her irrelevantly.

The old man's voice roused her.

"You are not so good-looking as you were; and you limp. How's that?"

"I had an accident," she replied briefly.

"And why do you call yourself Mrs. Marsden?"

"Because it is the name I have gone by for some years."

"Ever since I last saw you—eh?"

"Ever since you last saw me—nearly," she corrected. Then there was silence.

"Well," he said at length, "what is it all about? You have come for money, I suppose—women always do. Tell the truth solidly please, I've no time to waste."

The sneer in his words was intolerable.

"Yes, I have come for money," she replied, "because your son, Major Marmaduke Muir, married me six years ago. I've brought proofs with me."

If he wanted the truth he had got it. Bitter as she was, however, the sudden whiteness of the old man's face made her sorry for him. There was something more than anger here. That turned him purple; yet his words were resentful, nothing more.

"Then he is a damned fool!"

"You didn't write so to him seven years ago, Lord Drummuir," she began.

"H'm, so he showed you the letter, did he? No, you behaved well then—and, by God, I made them dance!" The recollection seemed to please; then a sudden thought evidently struck him. "Any children?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"One—a boy—died. Major Muir had an accident in the tilbury. The child," she paused, her eyes on the far stretches of dazzling white snow, "it—it ransomed my life. I shall never have another." Then with a rush all she had come to say sprang to mind and lips, she held out her hands appealingly. "Lord Drummuir, I wish you would let me tell my story!"

"Eh, what?" he replied peevishly. "Well, curse it all, I've been plagued by the gout and those two virtuous frumps for seven months, for Jack Jardine has the

jaundice, and you were deuced amusing last time. But, don't stop over there—makes me cold to think of you. Sit there, by the fire, and take off your bonnet; you look better without it. Women with good hair shouldn't wear bonnets."

She sat down as he bade her, feeling inclined to cry, he reminded her so much of Marmaduke.

He would not spare her any details; it seemed an amusement to him to hear of her doubts, her scruples, and he laughed aloud when she told him how two years ago she had dismissed her lover.

"Why?" he sneered. "Come, out with it!"

His hard clear eyes peered into hers.

"Because I didn't want to injure him, and I don't want to injure him now," she replied. "I haven't come to claim my rights as his wife."

"Then what the devil do you want, my lady?"

"I want you to do as you did before and give him the money to buy his colonelcy. If you will do this I will never claim to be his wife. He shall be as free, as far as I am concerned, to marry whom you choose."

Lord Drummuir sat looking at her with hard clear eyes.

"And if I don't," he said at last, "are you going to threaten me with this bogus marriage, for it may be bogus for all I know—eh, what?"

Marrion felt that the supreme moment had come; she must stake her all.

"No," she answered quietly. "To show you I threaten nothing, there are my marriage lines. Burn them if you will!"

She sat quite still while the old man, with fingers that

trembled visibly, unfolded the paper she gave him. There was no mistaking its worth. In Marmaduke's bold black writing were the words—

"I, Marmaduke Muir, second son of Baron Drummuir, of Drummuir Castle, hereby acknowledge Marrion Paul as my lawful wife." Underneath in her finer writing was her own acknowledgment of her tie to Marmaduke.

The old man, for all he had had no hopes of escape, was wary.

"You give this up because you know he, my fool of a son, has a counterpart, eh? That's about it, I expect?"

Marrion flushed to the very roots of her hair, but she spoke calmly.

"Yes, your son has the counterpart——" she began.

The old man burst into one of his sudden rude guffaws.

"Ha, ha, ha! And you thought you'd take in the old fox, my fine madam!" he said, then paused before the passion of her face.

"If you will listen you will believe me. I could claim to be his wife now if I chose. I do not choose. I prefer that he should lead the life he loved, that he should marry and bring you the heir for which—for which you would sell your soul, you poor old man! But Marmaduke is a soldier born; if he misses this chance he will be a disappointed man. As like as not he will never marry, even though he knows I've set him free. But send him this money, and I swear to you the counterpart shall be destroyed. What shall I swear by? I swear by the poor dead baby!" She paused. "Marmaduke said he was so like you. I never saw him. I was too near death."

Her voice trailed away to monotony. The old man sat staring at her, an odd tremor in his face.

"I swear it shall be destroyed," she continued. "I—I have very great influence over your son; he—he will do what I ask."

"Then why the devil are you giving him up, and your prospects here? They're not to be sneezed at by a woman like you!"

The phrase nettled her. She rose and stood beside him strong and steady.

"Lord Drummur," she said sarcastically, "I know you to be clever and I thought, being a gentleman, that you might have seen the truth and spared me the pain of that question. I will answer it, however. It is cause your son never loved me. He is very, very fond of me. He has been so ever since we were boy and girl together. And I have been of great use to him. But I could not bring love into his life, and I could not bring him a child. So it did not seem worth while; I could only stand aside."

There was a pause. The old man's face had grown sharp and paler; there was uncertainty even in the cruel lines about the mouth.

"You're rather an extraordinary young woman," he remarked coolly; "might have made your fortune on the stage. Wish I'd met you there!" He grinned. "But now to business. You have the whip hand, of course—I admit that. Now, if I give you—or that fool, my son, it's the same thing—the money for this paper, you promise to make him destroy his counterpart."

"I promise," she replied eagerly. "I can make him do most things——"

"Except love you," interrupted the old man, with a horrible sneer; but the next instant his gouty hand,

trembling a little, was outstretched to her in deprecation. "Excuse me, that should not have been said. Well, you know as well as I do that this game is a real confidence trick. You must have heaps of evidence up your sleeve if you chose to bring it forward. But I'll chance that. I haven't seen many of your sort in my life. If I had, I mightn't have been the cursed cripple I am; but I've had a rattlin' good life of it and I don't regret anything—except having begot Pitt. So we will come to terms. I will send the colonelcy money to Marmaduke on condition that he consents to marry within the year. Is that agreed?"

"Agreed," she said firmly.

"In that case perhaps you'll oblige me by ringing the bell."

She did so, but when the valet appeared, instead of the curt order to show her out Marrion had expected, the old man commanded the instant production of cake and wine.

"Nonsense!" he growled decisively to her protestations. "It is devilish cold. You haven't on warm enough clothes, and you don't leave this house without bite or sup, if only because your father Paul was a deuced good servant to my poor brother. Good fellow was Paul—always suspicioned he was a gentleman—think now he must have been. Here"—the valet had come and gone, leaving the tray on the table—"pour yourself out a glass of port. Won't get better anywhere, I'll go bail. Only half a binn left, so I shall finish that before I die, thank God! Now," he eyed her narrowly, "drink to the health of Marmaduke Muir's son, the heir to Drummuir!"

The room seemed to spin round for a moment. Then without a quiver she drank the health, put down her glass and turned to the door. Just as she reached it the old man said—

“Good-bye. I’m damned sorry that little chap of yours died; he would have been game, anyhow.”

She gave back one sudden grateful look, and the memory of what she saw remained with her till the day of her death. The pearly whiteness of the snow outside showing behind the mountain of diseased flesh swathed in scarlet flannel, the gouty hands in the act of tearing up the paper they had been holding, a cruel smile in the old grey eyes, despite the words which had just fallen from the cruel lips.

“Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.”

The phrase recurred and recurred as she tramped her way down the beech avenue. There were many gaps in it now. How many trees would be left when Marmaduke’s heir came to his own?

CHAPTER III

THE swing doors leading to the smoking-room of the fashionable club in London fell back with a slightly louder thud than usual, and more than one occupant of the room looked up—looked up, however, to smile, for the newcomer was a universal favourite. It was Marmaduke Muir, fresh from one of his many disappearances, for he was quartered at the new camp of Aldershot and his London visits were generally but a passing flash on his way to find sport in the counties. At seven-and-thirty he showed almost more youthful than he had done at seven-and-twenty, for he was thinner, more alert, and the laughter in his face seemed to belong to him more absolutely. For the rest he was handsome beyond compare, and dressed faultlessly in a taste that had sobered itself from those early days in England when Marrion Paul had found him *flamboyant*. There was still a slight exuberance in the carnation in his buttonhole and the immense size of the cigar he drew out of his case; but the case itself was simple, and there was a simplicity about his whole bearing which disarmed criticism.

“What you b’in after, old chap?” said an occupant of an armchair, laying down the “Illustrated London News,” in which he had been reading the pros and cons of beard and moustachios as against clean shaving. He

felt his own chin doubtfully as he looked at Marmaduke's upper lip; but then he, of course, was a soldier.

"Killin' somethin', I bet," yawned another. "What was it, Duke?"

"Not ladies, anyhow," put in a third. "Our Adonis is a regular misogynist; and yet, just look at his letters—faugh! they make the place smell like Truefitt's."

"Better than your fags, anyhow, Mac!" laughed Marmaduke, as he took the pile of notes and letters which the attendant had brought in on a salver. Then, as he threw himself into the most comfortable chair vacant, he held up half the bundle with a gay—"Anyone like them? They're all invitations, I expect, and I have to go back to-night!"

"And moneylenders, Muir! Don't forget Moses!" put in the man he had called Mac.

"Not so many of them either," retorted Marmaduke, "as you know Jack Jardine keeps us going. God bless him!" he added cheerfully.

"Here, hand us over a few, Major!" said a callow youth who lived to envy the more fashionable habitués.

"No go, Smithers!" remarked another youth less sallow; "even Nathan couldn't make you up to his form."

But Marmaduke, after a hasty glance at the superscriptions, had dexterously flung a dozen or so of letters into the applicant's tall hat, which was obstructing the way between his chair and the next. One smaller than the rest which Marmaduke had overlooked flew over it and lay on the carpet. It was directed in an uneducated hand.

"Hullo, pretty milliner, eh, Duke?" said Mac, taking it up and opening it. "No, no, fair play, you gave it——"

Marmaduke, standing over him, blushed like a girl as he glanced at the writing.

"It's nothing, Mac," he began.

But Mac was not to be put off in a moment.

"'Respekted and Honerd Sir'—can't spell, anyhow," he read out. "'The money as you scent save my wife an' children from blank starvayshion'"—he turned round and looked at Marmaduke reproachfully. "And you owe me five pounds, you d——d Christian philanthropist."

Marmaduke Muir gave an apologetic laugh.

"The poor devil was in my regiment once—and as for the five pounds, here you are. I had a stroke of luck down in Norfolk at loo——"

"Save you from 'blank starvayshion,' eh, Mac?" growled a man who also owed money in the same quarter, whereat there was a general laugh, for Major Macdonald was known to be near.

Marmaduke, opening his letters rapidly, put most of them into the waste-paper basket. Invitations from people he scarcely knew to balls and dances, others to festivities past and gone. Some few he put in his pocket, and one he sat and stared at as he smoked his cigar. Luncheon—one o'clock—there was plenty of time; and Louisa Marchioness of Broadway was the most amusing old lady in town. An old friend of his father's, too, though that wasn't in her favour. Still she was interested in the family, and had always been particularly kind to him.

An hour later, therefore, he sat waiting his hostess' appearance in the tiny drawing-room of one of that row of tiny houses which, till a very few years ago, stood back from Knightsbridge Road, separated from it by a tiny secluded carriage-drive of their own and opening out with little narrow strips of back gardens to the park. He was seated at the window, but it seemed to him as if he were close to the roaring fire; indeed, all things were close to each other in the small room where the big, central, mid-Victorian table, with its brodered tablecloth, solitary vase of flowers, and besprinkling books of beauty seemed to monopolise all space. One of these same books of beauty lay open at a simpering bottle-necked portrait subscribed in a fine feminine hand, "Louisa Broadway." It always did; the servant had orders to that effect.

"*À la bonheur, monsieur!*" came a voice from the door. It was the most ancient thing about Louisa Marchioness of Broadway. All else was open to manipulation and the manipulation was good. She did not, however, dye her hair. Spiteful folk said it was because powder had been the fashion when she was in the heyday of her beauty; but she was a very clever lady, and doubtless she realised how much more real a make-up seems when toned to white hair than to dark. As it was, the effect was still charming, and her figure was that of a girl of eighteen.

"*A moi l'honneur,*" quoth Marmaduke gallantly, as he advanced to kiss the old lady's outstretched hand and lead her to a chair.

In a certain set at that time there was a fashion for interpolating French into English—one of the signs of

the coming war which was darkening the horizon of Europe.

So they sat and talked lightly of it, and of the Prince Consort's unpopularity, and the coming opening of the King's new Royal Palace of Westminster, which are now, forgetfully and conveniently, called the Houses of Parliament, until luncheon was announced, and Marmaduke had to pilot his hostess down the narrow stairs—a difficult task which he felt would have been far easier had he carried her. And with the thought came in a rush that delight in freedom, that fresh enjoyment of the unconventional, which always made him remember Marrion Paul. It sobered him a little and he talked with more effort. Not that it mattered, since his hostess was all sparkle and wit. And the luncheon itself was everything that could be desired. Marmaduke, a bit of an epicure in personal matters, found the snug little horse-shoe table, with its curve to the fire so that you could feel the warmth while you looked out of the window, very conducive to comfort, for you sat undisturbed by servings behind you. All that went on in front, and you could see what was handed to you without fear of ricking your neck or getting the gravy spilt over your clothes. The *menu*, too, if sparse, was super-excellent. In her youth Louisa Broadway had been Ambassadress at various European Courts; she was a *gourmet* of distinction, so it was quite a complacent Marmaduke who at her invitation, after the servant left the room, turned his chair to the fire and joined his hostess in a glass of Madeira.

“And now for business,” she said, while her face took on a new expression which obscured the paint and the

prettiness, and left it wise yet kindly—wise with the wisdom of a worldly old age. “Now, you don’t suppose, do you, young man, that I asked you here to give you a good lunch—you’ll admit you have had one, I *présume*—and talk to you about things that don’t really matter a brass farthing to either of us? For what do you care about the Houses of Parliament, and what do I care about scandals—I have had plenty—*de trop*, in fact! No, I brought you here to introduce you to my grand-niece—Sibthorpe’s youngest daughter. She will be here immediately, and I want you to marry her.”

“Really, Lady Broadway!” flustered Marmaduke.

“Rather crude, I admit,” continued his hostess, “but I object to beating about the bush, especially when I want to get inside. The fact is, Marmaduke, I have heard from your father——”

“It is good of you to read his letters; they are not——” began the son stiffly.

“Don’t be silly, my dear lad,” went on the old woman, “your father has his faults, but he was quite as good-looking as a young man as you are—at any rate, I thought so. Now, he wants you to marry, and he has every reason to wish it. It is the only chance of an heir to the title, for Peter’s last escapade has about finished his hopes in that quarter.”

“I can’t discuss——” began Marmaduke very stiff.

“Oh, yes, you can!” went on the old lady imperturbably. “We are *en petit comité*, and I’ll confess to being old, very old, old enough to be your great-grandmother. Now, Marmaduke, a great-great-grandmother—did I put in the two greats the first time?—can talk over things more sensibly than even a great-great-grandfather. You

see, my dear, she has passed through it all and left it all behind her. And so, my dear child—I nursed you as a baby, remember—why don't you marry? Or perhaps you are married already?"

There was an exquisite lightness of raillery in the suggestion which absolutely barred offence, and there was kindness in the keen old eyes. Nevertheless, Marmaduke was uncomfortably aware that they took in his sudden flush. She gave him no time for interruption, however, and went on airily—

"For all I know the heir may already be in existence!"

Here Marmaduke asserted himself with great dignity.

"My dear madam, if I had any children I should acknowledge them!"

Louisa Lady Broadway smiled gently. She had gained one piece of knowledge, anyhow. The obstruction, if there was one, was a childless wife.

"I am glad to hear it, my dear, but I knew you had a good heart, or I wouldn't have risked speaking to you. I wouldn't do as much for one in a thousand. Now, my dear, I am nearly eighty years old, and I understand things as perhaps few women do understand them. I don't expect many men have lived to be your age without forming ties of some kind, especially if they live in Scotland, Marmaduke"—the thrust went home again, she thought — "but money does a lot, especially when there are no children. A good round annuity means much when a man is not well off, as you are, and has probably to wait for many years ere he falls into money—as you have, for Pitt is the heir, of course. But your father would find the cash——"

"If he would find the money to pay for my colonelcy,"

burst in Marmaduke, "it would be better than setting people to find out mare's nests! I don't mean to be rude, Lady Broadway; you are very kind, but I really can't discuss——"

"I think you can," interrupted Louisa Broadway in her turn, "especially if it is not a question of mere money, and money is, I believe, a very small matter to some people—to you, for instance, Marmaduke! You never think of it, do you, so long as you've got it?—ha, ha! But there are other considerations. To begin with, I believe that when there are no children a marriage should automatically become null and void. And apart from that I don't believe that any woman who really loves a man would ever stand in his light or prevent him from doing his duty. I am sure if I had had no children, and Broadway——" The illustration, however, was beyond even her powers of fiction, and the opening of the door brought relief. "Oh, here is the young lady! Amabel, let me introduce Major Marmaduke Muir. Major Muir, Lady Amabel Sibthorpe. I expect you are kindred spirits, as you are both such outdoor people."

The girl, who had rushed in somewhat uncere- moniously, looked up frankly into Marmaduke's blue eyes. There was undisguised admiration in her glance.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I've always wanted to know Major Muir since I saw him punish a horrid little boy in the park for bullying his dog!"

Marmaduke, as he made his bow, felt that the clever old lady with the painted face was very clever indeed. She had gauged her man completely. Most people on the task would have supplied him with a befrilled fashionable beauty; the sort of woman with whom he flirted,

who amused him, attracted him, tempted him. But this joyous, buoyant girl, with good-breeding in every line and feature——

No, Louisa Lady Broadway had made a mistake; she had reminded him of Marrion Paul.

So, after the shortest interval compatible with his rôle of charming young man, he took his leave and went fuming back to his lodgings in Duke Street, which he kept as a *pied-à-terre* for himself and Peter. The latter was out, so Marmaduke went straight up to his bedroom to change his London things for his uniform, since he had to report himself on arrival at Aldershot. There was plenty of time, but he meant to go round by Marrion's first. He had not seen her for over ten days, and——

Despite an anger at interference which had grown instead of diminishing, old Lady Broadway's words, "a woman who loves a man will never stand in his light or prevent him from doing his duty," would keep recurring to his mind. It was exactly what Marrion had said to him scores and scores of times. Curious, two such different women having precisely the same views. Not that they mattered. He had his own. Still, half-mechanically when he was dressed he took out of his despatch-box a small packet of papers, and, opening one of the envelopes, began to read the contents. One sheet was the excerpt from the visitors' book at the Cross-keys Inn where he had written "Captain the Honourable Marmaduke and Mrs. Muir." He smiled at it bitterly, wondering whether, if he had relied on that, as Marrion had begged him, he should have felt as bound as he did now. With a shrug of his shoulders he folded it again and thrust it back into the envelope. The other sheet was

a counterpart of the paper which Marrion Paul had, unknown to him, given to his father. He sat staring at it almost stupidly until a knock came to the door, when he hastily replaced it and put the bundle in his breast-pocket. The new-comer was Andrew Fraser, and he carried a letter.

"I was roond tae the club, sir," he said, with a salute, "as I thocht it might be o' importance seein' it was frae the castle; but you was awa."

The man's face was as ever, full of devotion and duty. The past seven years had brought him many an anxiety, many an agony, but he had stuck by the two beings he loved best on earth with a steadfastness beyond all praise.

"All right, Andrew," replied his master cheerily, "pack up, will you, and take the things to the station. I'm going round by Mrs. Marsden's."

"Very well, sir," replied the servant quietly.

He had been discretion itself all these years, ever since Marrion had come to him one day and told him the truth, that she was married. If she had not so told him, what would he have done? His simple soul could never answer the question.

Meanwhile, Marmaduke in a cab was reading his father's epistle, which ran thus—

"MY DEAR MARMADUKE,—I believe you are my son, so I expect you to give this letter your earnest consideration. As you are aware there is no heir to the title or estate. I had the misfortune to beget a creature who calls himself the Master of Drummuir and is not the master of anything. Then there is Peter, a promising

boy whom you have ruined by providing him with an attachéship at Vienna, a place which did for his uncle whom he greatly resembles. The accounts of the physician concerning his health are simply disastrous. He has narrowly escaped an asylum for life. This being so, it is imperative that you shall marry and produce an heir for the estate. I see by various letters of yours (unanswered) that you are again in want of money to purchase your promotion to colonel. It is a nefarious, a reprehensible swindle which should be abolished, and to which I should never yield were it not that I wish to strike a bargain with you—namely, I will purchase your colonelcy, if you will consent at once to seek out a suitable wife and marry her within the year. If you accede to this most reasonable request I will send a cheque to your bankers and I shall expect to see you—and Peter also if he is really sane—here for Christmas.

“Yours truly,

“DRUMMUIR.

“P.S.—Let me tell you, sir, that it is deuced dull here with those two virtuous frumps, my Lady and Penelope. They were more amusing when they were young. But if you come—and why shouldn't you?—we'll have a regular rouser.”

Marmaduke read this letter over twice. It was the kindest, most reasonable one he had ever had from his father. And the postscript touched him. Its very frankness made him realise what life must now be to one who in his youth had been “quite as good-looking as you are.”

Old Lady Broadway's words recurred to him as he

stood at the little door with its brass name-plate waiting for admission. And if he got his colonelcy and the command of the regiment? If there was going to be war——?

But was there going to be war? He felt a little as if he had to face an enemy as he ran upstairs two steps at a time.

CHAPTER IV

BUT upstairs all was peace, and Marrion, the light of the lamp on her bronze hair, beautiful as ever, looked up from her work, her face bright with pleasure.

"Ah, there you are! I was expecting you, for Andrew was round this afternoon and told me you were in town."

He did not go up to her or greet her; only smiled content and sank into the easy-chair placed between where she sat and the fire. The big table wheeled cosily into the corner was littered with lace and muslin. He took up a small pinafore and looked at it distastefully.

"I wish you wouldn't work so hard," he said suddenly, "and I hate to see you busy over those things; it reminds me——" he broke off.

She laid down the little frock she was embroidering on the instant, and went to kneel beside him; for her insight into this man's moods was complete, and she felt what was coming.

"And it reminds me too, Duke. That is why I love it. I have told you so often it was nobody's fault; if anybody's, mine."

He shook his head.

"You can't make me believe that."

"But it is true. See here, Duke, I ought never to have allowed you to bind yourself. It put me in a false position. I was too anxious to please, too anxious to pay you back the gift, as it were, so I did what I ought not

to have done. I thought of you, not of the child. But what is the use of going over it all again? It is past and done with."

He sat with his hands between his knees for a minute, looking at the fire.

"Well, I am sorry the poor little chap died."

It gave her the opening she needed.

"That is what your father said when I told him," she said quietly.

He stared at her.

"My father!"

"Yes, Duke, I have been to see him again. He was quite kind. Sit still and I will tell you everything."

And she told him though she saw his face grow stern and angry.

"You had no business to do it," he said, when she finished. "Can't you even leave me to manage my own affairs? I didn't interfere with yours when you broke away and set up on your own, did I?"

"You have been very good to me, Marmaduke," she replied, with a catch in her voice, "and I've tried to be as good to you."

The memory of many a helping hand, of long years in which this woman's companionship had been an anchor to him, came to appease his easy nature.

"Well, it is no use being angry," he said at last; "the thing's done. And you really destroyed your lines?"

"Your father tore them up. He quite agreed with me that as I had no children, and there was no chance of one—at any rate, of a living one—that I was bound to release you. And I am bound. I refuse to be your wife."

"And if I claim you?" he said swiftly, resentment in his voice.

She smiled.

"I shall still refuse you, then in three years we shall be automatically divorced."

"In Scotland only. You are very clever, my dear, but you forget some things."

His deft diversion, however, had done its work, the subject was no longer personal.

"It is impossible," he continued. "I can't leave you in the lurch."

"You don't. Look at it clearly, please. Since we agreed to separate——"

"I never agreed," he put in angrily. "I was quite ready to fulfil——"

"The bond," she interrupted a trifle bitterly, "and I wasn't or couldn't. But ever since then—and before then, too—before you came home, I kept myself. And I'm quite rich, Duke. I have money in the bank. There is no fear for me."

"Is it all money?" he said tragically, gloomily.

She laid her hand lightly on his knee; the touch thrilled her through and through, but he sat unmoved, looking at the fire.

"You can give me all you have ever given me still, dear," she said; "there is no reason why we should not continue to be friends."

There was a long pause. Then she began again—

"I promised your father you would destroy the counterpart. Duke, it is far better done. You will feel free, and you don't, somehow, now, though I hoped you would. And I shall be glad. A woman who loves a

man cannot bear to stand in the way of his doing his duty—and this is your duty——”

He turned to her.

“Just what that old harridan said. Curious you two should agree—and you’re so different !”

“What old harridan ?”

“Lady Broadway. She has been at me, too. Why can’t you women leave a man alone? She wants me to marry her niece, Lady Amabel.”

Marrion felt a sudden spasm of elemental jealousy. Self-sacrifice was exhilarating in the abstract, in the concrete it was painful.

“Did—did you see her ?” she asked.

“Yes—nice little girl. But—but if this is to be, how will you manage about Andrew? You had to tell him, if you remember.”

She remembered right well; remembered how even the man’s fidelity to his master, his devotion to her, would not stand the strain of what he thought wrong-doing. The difficulty had occurred to her before, but she set it aside now as of small importance in comparison with the destruction of the paper.

“I’ll manage Andrew,” she replied, “if you will only——”

He stood up tall and strong and curiously antagonistic.

“You are always managing, Marmie. Some day you’ll find you’ve made a mistake. But if you will have it so, I happen to have the paper with me.” He took out his pocket-book and handed her an envelope. “You can do as you like with it. Oh, it is the right one !” he added impatiently. “I was looking at it just now. I am not always a fool !”

She paused in a half-unconscious search induced by her knowledge of Marmaduke's careless habits. The contents of the envelope, half-pulled out, showed her the printed heading "Cross-keys Inn." She thrust them back hurriedly and dropped the whole into the fire. It flamed up showing his face full of irritation, hers of decision. They watched it flame, fade, sparkle out. Then he turned away.

"You've made me feel a scoundrel somehow," he said, "but I suppose I shall get over it in time."

"You've no right to say that," she flared out. "You've no right to put that thought into my life. We have done our duty."

"Well, don't let's part in anger, anyhow," he said kindly. "I shan't see you for some time. I'm on duty, and then I shall go north for Christmas, and then——"

"And you will get your colonelcy," she added.

He smiled.

"Yes, I shall get it, thanks to you again. Ah, Marmie, Marmie, it's no use your trying to unbind Tristram Shandy and the Shorter Catechism! We were mixed up together right away in the beginning of things, and we shall be mixed up in the end, you'll see. Now I must be off. Good-bye!"

He held out his hand. She took it and gripped it fast, every fibre of her athrill with the dear touch. Her whole soul seemed for the second to crave for him, for his presence always. And he was going away, out of her life for ever. For she was wiser than he was. She knew that her talk of continued friendship was a sham; one of the many baits she laid so often to get her own way. Ah, how weary she was of cutting and contriving

Dame Nature's plain, honest web! Well, she would have to do it no longer; it would be another's task. But there was one thing he had said which was not to be endured, which could not be allowed to pass.

"Good-bye," she said, "and don't please feel like a scoundrel. You never did a better deed in your life. You have done your duty like an honest gentleman, and—and I'm proud of you!"

"That's something, anyhow," he said, and was gone.

She sat down and began stitching away at a little gown she was making. It had to be finished that night, for the christening of the infant for whom it had been bespoken was on the morrow. And the task soothed her. For the more ordinary parts she had apprentices during the day who worked downstairs, but all the distinctive features of the marvellously delicate little garments came from her own clever fingers. That evening, as she worked away at a tiny wreath of snowdrops for another woman's child, every atom of her went out in unavailing regret for the little life that had gone to save her own. She was not worth it—nothing was worth it. Those men—father and son—might say "I am sorry the little chap died!" but did they, could they, would they, realise what it meant to a woman that something very precious, something which she was bound to protect, for which she ought to have given her heart's blood, had given her its own instead?

Well, she had paid for it since to the uttermost farthing. She had no illusions. Marmaduke had gone out of her life for ever.

Not entirely, however, for at Christmas time one of his long breezy letters came to her—for Marmaduke was a

great letter-writer—telling her about all her old friends in the neighbourhood; a charming, cheerful epistle, full of awed wonder at the extreme stoutness and sanctity of “stepmamma” and the rigorous respectability of Penelope.

“For the first time in my life,” he wrote, “I feel sorry for the old man, and I begin to think we did right, Marmie. In fact, I’m sure we did.”

Her lip hardened as she read. Undoubtedly they had done right, but——

She sewed harder than ever, wishing that the whole thing was settled and done with. Then there would be no more letters to bring pain.

Fate, however, had other things in store for her, for just after the New Year Andrew Fraser appeared in her small drawing-room. He came in, tall, gaunt, hard-featured as ever, stood at the door and saluted, as he had done ever since Marrion in self-defence had told him that she and his master were fast married.

“Back so soon!” she cried. “I thought the major was to be longer at the castle.”

“He is the colonel now,” returned Andrew gloomily, “an’ we are awa tae Portsmouth the day. But I cam’, Marrion, tae tell ye that the domed fowk in the ha’ at Drummuir were sayin’ ‘he was tae get marriet tae Lady Amabel.’ An’ that canna be.’

“Lady Amabel,” echoed Marrion, glad in a way of a surprise which enabled her to make a diversion, at any rate, for a time. “He didn’t say anything. I thought it was to be a bachelor party.”

Andrew snorted a vexed denial.

“Sma’ count o’ that! The auld peer had gotten Lady

Penrigg, the railway man's wife, tae gi' him countenance wi' the gentry, and there was the Marchioness o' Broadway and the young leddy—a nice, straight-speakin' girlie. An' it was a' decent and God-fearin' with curlin' and skatin' and sleighin' an' songs an' forfeits in the evenin'. Dewar, my lord's valet, tell't me he had never heard the Baron swear sae awfie as he did when he got tae his own room o' nichts. It jest turned him cauld. But it was lying on the poor falla's stummick a' day. Hoo'ever I didna come for that."

"And the major—I mean the colonel," interrupted Marrion hastily, "did he enjoy himself?"

It was an unwise remark, for it hastened what she wished to avoid.

"Ower much, mayhap," put in Andrew, taking a step nearer her, his little grey eyes looking at her with pathetic earnestness. "Marrion, my dear," he went on, "I've helt ma tongue a' these years, relying on your word that ye had your lines safe. Not that they matter sae much, since I can swear to yer bein' man and wife—aye, and mayhap bring ithers tae swear it, too. But I'm no satisfied, an' that's God's truth. Ye ken fine that by a' the laws o' God and man ye're bound together, an' surely ye're no seekin' to get past the responsibility that ye took upon yersels?"

There was something merciless in the stern solid figure before her; but Marrion had courage, and faced her task.

"Sit down, Andrew, and let me explain," she began, but he stood to attention more rigidly, and with a forecast of failure in her mind she went through the whole set of arguments she had used with success on Marmaduke. But here she had different metal to weld.

"Ye took it upon yersels," he reiterated. "It was the Lord's doin' that the poor wee bairnie didna live. It's ill tryin' tae get the better o' Providence."

The hopelessness of influencing him made her at last try an appeal to his personal devotion to her; but his reply sent her crimson to her very heart-strings.

"That's neither here nor there, Marrion. If ye was twenty times free by yere ain makin', I wadna take yer love at a gift."

The most she could get out of him was a promise to wait and say nothing till there was more than mere servants'-hall gossip to go by. He left her wearied and vexed, sorry that she had not been able to get him to hear reason, yet knowing that she was sure of her own ground, since, if she and Duke both refused to acknowledge marriage there could be no possible claim by anyone else. Only to take up this ground would, she foresaw, make Andrew into an enemy. Besides, it would be a confession of failure on her part, and the years had brought so much success to her in all her managements that the idea of defeat, even in a small thing, was irksome.

So for a day or two more she sat and worked while all the noise of London was deadened by the snow which defied man's effort to remove. In her quiet little street she felt as if she were wrapped away in a white winding sheet from all the interests of the world—waiting, waiting, waiting. It would come at last, of course. The *Court Journal* would have the announcement of an impending marriage in high life. Then, if Andrew were still inflexible, she must tell him he had no power. And then—and then—and then?

Her mind busied itself in plans, in conjectures, more

from habit than from any hope of action; for in her heart of hearts she knew, and she was always telling herself, that she had said good-bye to Duke for ever.

Yet, as has been said, Fate had willed otherwise. Less than a week after Andrew's visit, she stood up, her heart beating, at a well-known step coming up two stairs at a time, and there was Duke! A Duke such as she had always dreamt he should be—radiant, rejoicing—a perfect specimen of manly beauty. He was in the full-dress uniform of his Highland regiment, and he flung his bonnet in among the laces and muslins, as if the whole world were his.

"We're off to Constantinople to-morrow," he said joyously, "and I had to come and say good-bye. Oh, my dear, my dear, what a relief it is—every way!"

She gasped.

"But war—war hasn't been declared yet!"

"And won't be for another two months," he interrupted, "but for all that we are sending our troops. It's kept secret, of course, but my regiment is in it. It seems too good to be true!"

"And—and Lady Amabel?" asked Marrion, a grip at her heart.

He laughed joyously.

"No harm done. You see the War Office told me when I got the colonelcy this was up, and it wouldn't have been fair. So we were very good friends. She is a dear little girl, and if I come home—but that's to be seen. Now, ah, how glad I am to be free!"

The words cut deep, spoiling the relief at Marrion's heart; but, after all, why should he not be glad? He was going to do a man's work.

"I'm glad you have the colonelcy," she said soberly; it was the only consolation she could find for herself.

"Glad!" he echoed. "I should think I was! It's been the dream of my life. And do you know the old man was really quite reasonable about it. We talked the thing over, and I told him what we had done, and were prepared to do—or rather not to do. Of course he was in a fury about the foreign service, but he saw I couldn't shirk, so I've promised and vowed everything he wanted. And now"—his eyes shone, content seemed to radiate from him—"I feel, Marmie, as if I were beginning a new life. I've only had to obey orders hitherto, and deuced stupid many of them have seemed to me; but now I am head and the men are splendid—they'd follow me anywhere. So—so we are going to do something, I expect."

The light in his eyes had steadied, he took up his bonnet, then stood for a moment looking at her, the embodiment of a soldier of fortune going out, careless, to seek adventure.

"And you, my dear," he said doubtfully, "are you sure you can manage?"

"Quite sure," she replied cheerfully. "Perhaps I shan't stop here. I may want to see the world, too."

He laughed.

"I believe you'd like to don boy's clothes like Rosalind and follow me to the wars! By Jove, what a Rosalind you'd make!"

His happy carelessness hurt.

"You forget I am lame," she said, a trifle bitterly.

His face fell.

"That isn't kind," he protested, "not at the last! Don't send me away feeling that I have been a ruffian to you."

Her composure gave way then. With a little cry she put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, my dear, my dear! Go!—forget all about women! Go! You've done your best, so fight your best!"

He gave her back her kiss as he might have given it to his sister.

"Yes, Marmie," he said, "I'm beginning to think we really did the right thing, for we can be friends all the same; for the present, at any rate."

His mixture of wisdom and foolishness made her smile at him, as some mothers might smile at a high-spirited boy, and she watched his martial figure go swinging down the street, its flamboyance admissible, admirable, and told herself it was good that he was free both of herself and Lady Amabel.

CHAPTER V

HE sent her a letter from Malta, a very long letter crossed and recrossed. Evidently time had hung heavy on hand once the wonders of being on a steamship had passed. "It will revolutionise war," he wrote, "if we can rely on getting reinforcements regularly. It was different when we had to count on hurricanes and doldrums." And he had a quick eye for weak points in the armour. "Here we are after eleven days' hard steam, and here, so far as any one knows, we are likely to remain. Nothing seems to have been arranged for a forward movement; neither has any provision been made for the hunger of fifteen thousand troops plumped down on a practically desert island. However, they say a cattle transport is immediately expected from Alexandria, so we should have enough beef. Meanwhile, the recent order that neither officers nor men should appear out of uniform gives colour and variety to the streets of Valetta; notably when they are tramped by Yours affectionately."

It was not till late in April that he could send her his impressions of Gallipoli.

"Take the dilapidated out-houses of a real old English farmyard, add to them every seedy, cracked, rickety, wooden structure to be found in our slums, with a sprinkling of Thames-side huts, and tumble them all down higgledy-piggledy on a bare round hill sloping to the sea, scatter about a few slender white minarets, and you

have the town—a place without shade, without water, without food. We can, of course, do the Kilkenny cat trick, but is it not astounding, is it not incredible, that such mistakes should be made? However, an enterprising entrepreneur from Smyrna (Jew, of course) is transforming a battered old ruin into a ‘Restaurant de l’Armée Auxiliaire’ as the legend runs, done with a thumb in lamp-black!”

Already “considerable difference of opinion” existed as to the choice of Gallipoli as the headquarters of the army, and the mere watering “of thirty-five thousand troops” presented difficulty.

And always and always came the same refrain of chafed patience at being enmeshed in the mistakes of others. “The stores sent for the commissariat are beneath contempt. I let out at the quartermaster for the filthy stuff he was serving out, and he assured me it was the best he could get. Conningsby of the Hussars tells me half the bales of hay sent out as forage have centres of wood shavings. Why isn’t someone hanged?”

Marrion Paul, as she read these two effusions, felt vaguely that the guilt was wearing off the gingerbread. The man’s buoyant hopes were being dashed by the ineptitude of those above him. It was a pity, for she knew, none better, that underneath all his boyish lightheartedness Marmaduke Muir had the knack of making men obey him and follow him. She pictured him leading his regiment into fight and she could see it, mastered, dominated, held in hand by that cheerful voice, that merry face.

She waited some time for the next bulletin and when it came it was short. “The devil’s own snowstorm greeted

our arrival here—Scutari. I've seldom seen it worse in Aberdeenshire. The north wind blew big guns, we were unable to disembark, and half of us—including yours truly—were sea-sick. Doing nothing, even without enough to eat, doesn't suit Marmaduke Muir. The barracks here are huge; they will hold eighteen thousand troops, they say. I know one unit of a thousand—only about seven hundred and fifty I fear now—that would be right glad to go anywhere else; anywhere where there was something to be done. Nigh four months since we left Portsmouth, and, for all the use I've been, I might as well have enjoyed the trout-fishing on the Don."

That was the third of the slender envelopes marked "From the British Army in the East" which reached her.

The next was sealed with a black seal and was full of pious reflections upon death; for the news of his elder brother Pitt's demise had just reached Marmaduke and roused his sense of responsibilities. "In times like these," he wrote, "one feels the impotence of man—and woman also," he added, "though you, my dear Marrion, had a wonderful knack of clarifying the muddles. Andrew does not darn my stockings half so well as you did."

But the beauties of Varna got the better of his reflections and he drew a picture of it that filled Marrion with doubts and delight. "It is as beautiful as Scotland—the lakes stretching away into the scarped woody hills, the sea—so calm that the clouds reflected seem to sail on it—almost motionless on the shore. The green sward down to the very edge of the lakes, carpeted with flowers, especially with irises. They call it the flower of death in India, and I noticed an evening mist, thick enough almost to be called a fog, rising at sunset from the low

levels and enveloping the town. It did not augur well for health. As for the town itself, words fail. It is Gallipoli over again with fewer drains and more filth. Yet to look at it in the clear sunlight, it is the new Jerusalem. And there are angels in it, Marmie; the sort of angels you love. I really think these little Turks and Turkesses are the prettiest children I ever saw. Their little yellow faces and big brown eyes make one think of Rubens' cherubs seen through smoked glasses like an eclipse! And an eclipse of most things it is often for the poor little beggars. At Kustendji, the other day, Hyde Parker found a couple of pure babies on the battlefield where the Russians had been bombarding. They're the pets of his frigate now; but there are dozens of them who have no such luck, and dozens more, I expect, who die of sheer hunger because we locusts of war eat up everything. There will be ninety thousand of us here before long, and for how long? God knows! Five months and nothing done! I wonder how you would stand it? But it wouldn't happen if you were at the head of affairs. You'd manage somehow. I feel it in my bones. And, joking apart, women would be very useful out here. We are going to have a lot of sick to begin with, and then the misery of the poor folk in town and village is appalling. However, I suppose England must have time to turn round and yawn before she wakes up to anything."

Marrion Paul got that letter early one June morning. She laid it down among the muslins and laces and went to the window. The street was empty, but she saw, as clearly as if he had really been there, Marmaduke Muir's buoyant figure going forth to war, full of hope and confidence.

She never took long making up her mind ; and, absolutely without ties as she was, there were few factors to be considered. Her business was such a personal one that she had only herself to consult. She had money and to spare in the bank. Finally, within her heart was the same spirit of adventure, the same disregard of conventionalities which had always attracted her in Marmaduke.

Last of all his stockings were not adequately mended.

She laughed aloud at the whimsical thought, for she had no intention of thrusting herself upon him. But she could be near at hand, and she, at any rate, need not turn round and yawn before she realised that women could help.

So quietly, methodically, she set matters in train to get all the work she had in hand speedily finished. She wrote declining a few orders that had come in, and then set off with one of her daintiest little creations to see the wife of the Turkish ambassador, who happened to be one of her customers.

But, indeed, as Mrs. Marsden, of the "*Layettes*," she could command plenty of backstairs influence.

The result being that in less than a week she was stepping into the Dover boat on her way to Marseilles, that being the quickest route to Constantinople. She carried with her credentials from the ambassador's family, which she meant to use, if necessary, though she hoped to be able to do without them, as anything in the nature of publicity might prevent her carrying out her plan of reaching Varna without Marmaduke being aware of the fact. As a precaution she wrote to him the day

she left, telling him not to expect further news from her for a few weeks as she had decided on attempting a cure for her lameness, which a clever young hospital doctor had advised, but which involved a long rest.

She had engaged her passage to Constantinople by a small Turkish mailboat which sailed between Marseilles and the Black Sea. She did this partly from desire to avoid her fellow-countrymen and the possibility of recognition or notice, but more because the voyage would give her an opportunity of learning a few words of Turkish and of becoming acquainted at least with the husk of Turkish ways. She had brought a grammar with her, and was laboriously learning perfectly useless phrases, when something occurred which sent books to the right-about and plunged her at once into the work she had hoped almost beyond hope to be able to reach. Cholera, at that time sweeping erratically through Europe, broke out among the steerage passengers. A mother died, leaving her month-old baby to be cared for as best it could. Marrion claimed it, thus became acquainted with the ship's surgeon and was his right hand in the sharp, decisive epidemic that followed. It was one of those shipboard epidemics when every hour brings a new case, until suddenly, with some change of wind or course, the sickness ceases as it came, mysteriously. They were off the coast of Candia when the little Turk doctor, who had passed at a French medical school, made an elaborate bow, laid his hand on his heart, and said, "*Madame, je suis votre serviteur.*" The few convalescents lying about in the scuppers murmured the same thing in Turkish, making Marrion realise that what she had set herself to do was possible, if only she could get footing amongst

the people. She decided finally on consulting her new friend, the little surgeon.

"Varna!" he echoed. "So madame desires Varna! That is strange, since, being in quarantine, we shall not be allowed to stop at Constantinople. We must go on straight to Varna, where the disease already is."

She caught in her breath.

"Not bad, I hope?"

"Of the troops I know little," he said, "but the townsfolk have suffered terribly. It is semi-starvation. Hein!" he interrupted himself hastily, and slapped his baggy trousers, "there is an old man there—a cripple—one of the old school of medicine that knows nothing. He has a sort of hospital where folk die decently. If I were to tell him the use you were, and that you had your own stores of Europe medicines"—for Marrion had spent a considerable sum in fitting herself out for the part she hoped to play—"he might like your help. You have plenty of money?"

His little sharp eyes were alight with interest.

"I have plenty of money," replied Marrion promptly, "and I mean to spend it."

"Then you may consider it settled," said the surgeon. "Old Achmet is a sort of relation of mine. I come of a physician family; but I warn you the presence of an English lady in Varna will not pass unnoticed."

"I shall dress as a Turkish lady," remarked Marrion, with a smile. "I had thought of that. The *yashmak* is very convenient."

The little Turk laughed in high good humour.

"The dress will become madame. She will have many admirers; but I will be the first."

So it was settled lightly, but, as the little steamer puffed and panted over the blue Archipelago where the blue islands lay scattered like so many shadows, Marrion Paul felt somehow as if the net of Fate were closing in on her. There was the scent of Death in the air.

She felt it almost overwhelmingly when, on the first night of her arrival at Varna, she stood on the rickety wooden verandah of the half-ruined house which had been found for her, looking out over the long line of inland lakes that in the past month had gained from the intruders whose white tents showed everywhere the dismal name of "Lake of Death." A white miasma rose from it, hiding the level green fields which in the sunset had glowed purple-red with the meadow saffron. Everything had gone smoothly. The old *hakim* Achmet had gripped on the hope of money, and Marrion Paul, who had remained on board the steamer until all negotiations had been made, had simply stepped into the dinghy in her Turkish dress and been carried with due privacy to the house chosen for her. Mercifully, the ship's surgeon—who was delighted at his importance as *entrepreneur*—had been impressed by Marrion's appearance, and, arguing therefrom the length of her purse, had fixed on a villa which had once belonged to a pasha of some sort. It stood high among cypresses on the Devna road, but, by a steep descent, was close to the worse slums of the town.

So, as Marrion stood, trying to realise her position, it seemed impossible, unreal that she should be within touch of Marmaduke—if he were still there—if he were not dead. An indefinable sense of tragedy impending—tragedy that was not all grief, but which, by very excess of joy, of glory, of intensity, transcended the normal and

so became almost fearful, seemed to hang round her. She ate the Turkish supper provided for her by the large fat shrill-voiced woman she found in charge; she lay down in the Turkish quilt arranged for her on a wooden bed and tried to leave all questionings for the morrow; but she could not sleep. The cry of the *muezzin* from a minaret hard by divided the night into set portions. She lay and listened to it.

"Al-sul-lah to khair un mun nun nu."

She knew what it meant—"Prayer is better than sleep." But she seemed unable to do either the one or the other.

Mercifully, again, the night was not long. Far away over the sea in the east the dawn began to break golden. It lit up the scarped hills above the woody slopes and slowly, like a white curtain, the mists of the valley lifted, showing the shiny levels of the inland lakes. Below her, at her feet, beyond the vine pergola set with purpling bunches of grapes that jutted against the blue distance, lay the town, a packed mass of red-tiled roofs and shingled outhouses, incoherent, barely cognisable. There lay her work; not over yonder where, like little heaps of lime, the white bell-tents outlined every hill.

Hark, the world was waking! From every side sounded the *réveillé*, echoing and re-echoing among the hills.

How many men had died that night whose ears would never more hear the call to duty! Was Marmaduke one of them?

Yes, the shadow of death lay on everything; but at least they were together in it.

CHAPTER VI

BUT even that poignant question as to whether Marmaduke lived or did not live lost its arresting power before what she saw when, guided by the *hakim* Achmet, she threaded the maze of lanes and alleys which still formed the real Varna. The quays, it is true, had been widened and glorified. Along them gay restaurants and *cafés chantants* were to be found, filled with reckless soldiers and still more reckless courtesans. A wide street had been hacked through tenement houses and lined with tawdry shops which catered for all and every luxury that can give a moment's pleasure to idle men. And there were plenty of them here, waiting, waiting still for that expedition of one hundred thousand soldiers to the Crimea, of which for months past the English papers had been full. Outwardly, therefore, so far as a fringe of welcome and a passage through it to the hills beyond went, Varna was what folk boasted it had become, a cosmopolitan town; but within, down by the back wharves and the sodden sea-alleys, round by the crushed-in closes and stifling courts, it was old, rotten, kept from utter putrefaction by the hot sun which, while it bred flies, dried up the muck of many men. The *hakim's* hospital was in the wide courtyard of a mosque, one of the few air-holes left to the seething city; and Marrion Paul never forgot her first sight of the sunlit square set round with the dead and dying. The stench was unspeakable, and

as she stooped over the first patient she saw that the sheet which covered him was alive with vermin. Achmet himself, a hunchback with a high-featured, intolerant face, seemed to think that sitting in the middle of the courtyard reciting his beads and exhorting the inmates to have patience and trust in God, was the best treatment he could offer. Mayhap it was, since half the forms that lay moaning on the stones were doomed to death. That night, when Marrion returned to her cypress-set villa, the first thing she did was to cut off her beautiful hair close to her head, and as she laid the great tresses away she thought once more of Marmaduke. She must find out about him when she had time, but that day and the next she had her work cut out for her. "Maryam Effendi" they had already learnt to call her, and old Achmet, with a daily stipend of so many piastres, was content to let her have her way. But there were other places besides the mosque hospital where some fifty men groaned and died, or groaned and got better, that were surcharged with misery and death. Hovels where babies tugged vainly at their dead mother's breasts and old women sat starving silently. It was among these that after a day or two Maryam Effendi was busiest. She settled to her work bravely, increasing her stock of Turkish rapidly and gaining for herself sufficient friends and aid to enable her to enlarge her sphere of usefulness. One of these was big fat "Heart's Darling," as her solitary servant was called, who, transferring domestic duties to an unspeakable drudge she produced, took up the duties of interpreter on the strength of some slight knowledge of French.

And Fate was so far kind to Marrion that she had

little trouble in finding out the news she desired to hear. A sort of local rag in French and English was published in which, for equivalent of a penny, she learnt that Marmaduke's regiment was still camped six miles out among the hills and that he was still in command. From her verandah she could actually see the very place where he must be. Once, indeed, as she was hurrying along the quay in the ordinary dress of the Turkish gad-about woman she caught a sight of Andrew Fraser, tall, gaunt, serious as usual, looking on distastefully at one of the many drunken rows that occurred every day. The temptation to go up and speak to him was great, but she stuck to her plan and passed on. When she had really done something she would write and tell Marmaduke she was at hand, but not till then. Possibly, had she seen him instead of Andrew Fraser she might not have been so firm; for a glance would have shown her that she could have been of use. In truth, the inaction, the constant fret of feeling that all initiative is of no avail, was beginning to tell on Marmaduke Muir. He also looked down of an evening on the white pall that covered the Lake of Death, and wondered—without one shadow of fear, but from simple curiosity—whether the levels of life would meet his eyes again. And they seemed such low levels now! Yes, he had missed something in his life! What was it? These, however, were very secret thoughts. To the little coterie of careless men of which he was the centre, he was, as ever, the mainspring of everything. Even the divisional commander sought his sympathy as day after day the orders for the front tarried, and day after day the regimental chaplain grew busier and busier. For cholera was rampant in the

camps as in the town, and every evening the "Dead March in Saul" echoed out through the hills and over the purple crocuses.

"Nothing will stop it, sir," said the young colonel quietly, "except orders for Sebastopol. The men are dead sick of waiting and so am I; that is the truth."

And still the orders lingered on the way. The waiting army did its best to pass the time. Marmaduke took to tying flies, and thereafter thrashed the hill streams with ill success. And he played cricket with the men, though it was ill finding a proper pitch on the steep hill-side where they were encamped; and he had to keep his men from those low levels as much as he could, being rewarded for his care by the fact that his battalion suffered less from the scourge than any other. Though this was not to be wondered at, seeing that it was commanded by one whose cheery youth and strength seemed to defy Fate.

"The Cornel's face is mair tae the purpose nor your pills, doctor," said a young recruit fighting his best for life. "I'll just tak a sup o' it, if ye please, and leave tither alane for fowk as likes them."

Yet that same face often showed a touch of weariness in it when, after his wont, Marmaduke would climb the hill behind his hut in order to smoke his solitary after-breakfast cigar at the foot of a scarp whence the most astounding view of God's world was to be had. Hills and still more hills. Seas and still more seas; lakes and still more lakes. Flowers and still more flowers.

"It is the inaction, Mac," he said to his old friend of the regimental club one day after mess dinner. They had been perforce laughing at the plight of a braw Hie-

landman who had been brought up to orderly-rooms that day from the general guard, clad in Zouave trousers and jacket, kepi and all complete; only the chequered hose of his own uniform remaining to betray the drunken bout on which he had been engaged.

"I noo 'im by 'is legs, sir," said the sergeant solemnly, "so I brought 'im along."

"'Pon my soul, I can't help sympathising with the poor beggars," he went on. "Why the devil can't they give the men something to do besides getting drunk? Here is the tenth of August and, so far as I can see, I might be off grouse-shooting on the twelfth. Good Lord, what wouldn't I give to be on Braemore with my dogs! They're the best——"

And he began, in true sportsman style, over the virtues of his setters; whereat others joined in with tales of their own. So, heartened up, they all repaired to Marmaduke's favourite vantage ground to finish their cigars.

It was a perfect evening. The day had been hot, but with the sun setting a little cool sea-breeze had sprung up which seemed to freshen even the very flowers that had flagged with the sun's heat. They sat, growing more and more silent as the day died down; and, indeed, what lay before their eyes was sufficient to make most men hold their peace; for it was beautiful exceedingly. The far Euxine fading grey into a pearl-grey sky. Overhead and behind them the rose-pink pennons of the departing sun floating on the unfathomable clearness of space. Within the bay great ships of war showed, half-hidden in the evening haze which turned the squalid city into dreamland.

Close at hand lay innumerable little hills and ravines

thrown in sharp shade and shine that trended away on all sides to the long line of lakes over whose purpling levels a fine veil of vapour was rising softly, swiftly.

Truly a dream-picture, unreal in its absolute beauty, its perfect peace.

"That's the *Agamemnon*, I expect," said one pointing with his cigar to a big vessel that, rounding the promontory to the south, began to cross the bay, leaving a great trail of smoke behind her. "I wonder if she is coming in?"

"Looks like it," said another, "only they weren't sure. Anyhow, we've company to-night. Look down there by the second wharf. There's another trail—some steamer is making fast!"

All eyes turned to where a thin column of smoke showed, rising high then drifting westwards over the town.

"Burning bad coal whatever," assented Mac. "Why, it's getting bigger!"

Marmaduke, watching intently, suddenly started up.

"By George, it is odd! I believe—by heavens, gentlemen, it is a fire!"

They all followed his example. And now there could be no doubt. With amazing rapidity the cloud darkened, deepened, then in the departing daylight showed dusky red. And there—flashing up suddenly came a great fork of flame. Marmaduke looked round on the others.

"The town is tinder," he said briefly, "and the magazines—— We had best be off!"

There was no need for more. In truth there was danger. The wind blew westwards. There were no fire-engines, so every man might be wanted.

And now the sound of fire alarms on the men-of-war

echoed out stridently, and boatload after boatload of blue-jackets, armed with pumps and pipes, shot from every ship. Almost before Marmaduke was on his horse, after ordering fatigue parties to come on at the double, streams of water were pouring on the burning houses. To no purpose. The fire had originated in a wine and oil shop and both burnt fiercely. By the time he reached the town but one word was on the lips of every responsible officer—"The magazines!" They were full up. On them depended the possibility of the attack on Sebastopol; on them therefore hung the fortunes of war. They stood still far from the blazing town, but it burnt like the matchwood it was, and between them and it lay, as it were, nothing but fresh tinder ready to take fire at a spark.

"Those houses should come down, sir," suggested Marmaduke to a general, and almost before assent answered him, had sprung to organise the work. But ramshackle, tumbledown though the wooden piers and pilasters seemed, they were curiously strong, needing time for destruction. Hawsers were brought ashore to facilitate the job and parties told off to each house. Three hundred soldiers—mostly French—lay to manfully on one of the ropes, pulling for all they were worth, when just as the house they were tackling began to totter a loud explosion came from within. And, lo! the only two men left on that rope were Marmaduke and a young French officer who clicked his heels together and stood to the salute with a merry "*Mes compliments, mon Colonel!*"

"*À vous, Monsieur le Capitaine!*" returned Marmaduke laughing, as he rallied the men.

"It's not the magazines, boys!" he called. "We've to save that yet. Yo-ho—heave ahoy!"

They set to again with a will; but the flames gained ground every instant and the densely dark cloud of smoke drifting over the magazines showed alive with ominous shoals of sparks.

"Mac!" shouted Marmaduke, as he worked like a demon, when his major came hurrying past with another fatigue party. "Get hold of someone and suggest the commissariat blankets; there are bales and bales of them somewhere. Put them on the magazine roofs, soak 'em with water. Tell the blue-jackets——"

"All right, sir!" shouted back the major.

And thereon came blankets, bales on bales of them, and blue-jackets swarming up and over everything, and jets of water turned from their useless work on houses that would burn, to keep those blankets sodden.

The din was deafening. The inhabitants, swept out of their houses, stood huddled in the streets and kept up a constant wail. The bugle calls rang out here, there, and everywhere, and above the roar and crackle could be heard voices in urgent exhortation—"All together, men! The blue-jackets are laughing at you!" "Heave away, I say, boys, show the land-lubbers how to do it!" Or shriller, more passionate—"A moi, mes enfants! Les Anglais nous regardent!"

Once there came a sudden pause. The red flare of the conflagration changed to brilliant blue.

"Milles tonnerres!" cried the French soldiers sadly, as they recommenced work. "Ahé, le bon eau-de-vie!" Their commissariat canteen store had gone.

So through the long night they worked, fighting the

flames with their hands for the most part. Fatigue party after fatigue party poured into the town and one strong man after another lay down exhausted on the quays and begged someone to cool him with water.

It was just as a faint lightening over the sea in the east showed dawn was nigh that Marmaduke, wiping the sweat from his blackened forehead, said—

“I think that’s done with. The magazines are safe now!”

“Yes,” said a man near him, “up here it’s almost over. But they’ve got it still down there, by the dock wharves, poor devils!”

Marmaduke, whose every thought and look had hitherto been for the magazines, turned to the lower part of the town.

“By Jove, they have!” he cried. “Here, men, follow me!”

“Let me go, sir,” put in a subaltern. “You must be done—and they should all be out of their houses by now.”

He might as well have saved his breath. Marmaduke, careless of fatigue, was racing to danger again. And here it was greater. The two or three story ramshackle houses almost closed in upon each other, and in one burnt-out street he had to pass through, a charred beam almost finished him. But he raced on; and here there was evidence that the fire had been faced with some method. Houses had been pulled down, the inhabitants ordered to certain open spaces, and as he neared the spot where the tenements almost overhung the water’s edge, a double line of men were passing buckets. There were only two houses left in the street; one was in flames, the other, overhanging the water, must soon go. Seeing the

hopelessness of saving it, or indeed the use, since evidently those were the occupants who, with shrill cries and excited gestures, were watching the destruction of their property, he was about to seek work elsewhere when a big fat woman almost overset him in her eagerness to find his feet. To these she clung, shrieking at the top of her voice—

“Maryam Effendi! Maryam Effendi! *Elle est là, elle est là! Sauvez le—Sauvez le——*”

He would have been at a loss even to grasp the last words had not a figure shown at that moment on the roof of the burning house. It was the figure of a tall woman in white and the flare of the flames showed that she carried a baby in her arms.

“My God!” he muttered under his breath, for there seemed no possibility of escape.

“Maryam Effendi! Maryam Effendi!” wailed the crowd, adding in mixed French and Turkish—“She has the child! Ah, the brave woman! She has the child!”

Aye, she had it, and she meant to hold it, too! A brave woman indeed! Pausing for a second in her perilous effort to pass from one roof to the other she pulled off her veil, wrapped it round the child, and knotted it high above her shoulders. Then, hands and knees, set herself to her task. But the flames were almost too quick for her. And forked tongues licked at her feet; the next instant she was beyond them and, straightening herself, walked rapidly over a level strip. And now from below, where even Marmaduke stood arrested, helpless, watching another’s fight for life, came a soft wail of horror. The last house had caught fire

from below, the flames were surging upwards, the thin shingle roof might be gone any moment.

"Jump, for God's sake, jump!" cried Marmaduke, his voice vibrant with awful dread. "Jump, we'll catch you, somehow!"

Even as he spoke he felt the uselessness of his appeal to one who could not understand.

"Tell her to jump—we'll catch her!" he added dully, knowing there was no time, for already ominous crackings rose from the flames that mounted higher and higher.

But that familiar voice had reached the ears of the woman clinging her way for dear life, and tightened her hold upon the ridge-pole that was her only hope. No, she would not die yet! She would not die with that voice in her ears!

A faint shudder came from the crowd below as, with a crash, the roof fell in. A fainter moan of relief followed, as the woman with her pack still showed standing on the crossway beam of a balcony that overhung the water. A great tongue of flame shot out at her, but at the instant she raised her joined hands above her head and dived—a flash of white lit up by the red flare—into deep water.

"By heaven, what pluck!" muttered Marmaduke as, without a second's delay, he plunged from the wharf and swam, with quick overhand strokes, to where the woman had disappeared. He was just preparing to dive after her when she came up close beside him.

One look was sufficient.

"Marmie!" he cried. "God in heaven, am I dreaming? Marmie!"

"Yes—yes," she gasped impatiently, for owing to the weight she carried her dive had been prolonged. "The child's head—see that it is out of water!"

In a second he was cool, self-reliant.

"Your hands on my shoulders, please. That will raise you—I must swim round—the burning wood."

In truth every instant a fierce hiss, a cloud of steam close to them showed where some blazing fragment had fallen to be extinguished.

"Are you all right?" he called over his shoulder, as with powerful strokes he made for a further wharf.

"All right; but please be quick—the child——"

How like Marmie—always the child—the child. He swam on, feeling bewildered but, he knew not why, desperately happy.

"I don't understand," he began, when at last they stood dripping side by side, and the baby, being unloosed from its wrappings, was found to be none the worse.

"I will tell you directly," she said. "I must just give the child back to its mother; it is quite a tiny thing. Then you can walk up to my house over yonder and get your clothes dried."

But the stifling air of the streets soon scorched up the moisture, and Marmaduke protested against anything but a cup of hot coffee—which fat "Heart's Delight" bustled away to prepare—while those two stood and talked on the verandah. Below them lay the town, still smoking; still—as a puff of dawn wind blew the embers to redness—sending out a shower of sparks, or even a forked tongue of flame. The smell of burning filled their nostrils, the memory of a great escape filled their minds. And beyond that, under and deeper than that, stretched

the atmosphere of death and disease, of constant danger, in which they had both been living for so long. It is an atmosphere which invariably brings with it, to the wholesome mind and body, a feeling of revolt against such limitations, a distaste of all things that pertain to decay, a keen appetite for those that belong to life.

And the dawn-light grew as they stood talking. She had bidden him begone, had urged as a reason that he must remember his health. Cholera might be bad on the hills, but it was deadly in the city. And he had laughed back that caution was a bit late to a man who had seen six strong men die that very morning. The poor devils seemed to like his being there. Now he——

"I should only want *you*, Marmie," he said. And she had looked at him in sudden wonder.

"I must go now if I'm to be in time for parade," he admitted at last. "Good-night—no, good-morrow, my heart's delight!"

For an instant she held he was joking with the fat coffee-bringer's name; then she gave a quick tremulous cry——

"Duke! what—what do you mean?"

He laughed a little low, happy laugh, sank on his knees beside her, and clasped her tight in his arms.

"Only that I love you—only that I've found you—no, I've found myself for ever and ever and ever!"

He buried his face in the loose folds of her dress and so they remained for a second. Then she slipped through his hold to her knees also, and they knelt looking into each other's eyes.

The sun rising slowly, majestically, out of the sea

shone upon their shining faces. Vaguely, as in a glass, darkly the twain had passed to one; they were nearer the Great Unity.

"Duke," whispered Marmie, with a faint shiver, "I think I'm afraid!"

"And I," he said joyously, finding her lips, "feel as if I never could be afraid again—never—never—never!"

CHAPTER VII

"DUKE," she said, for at least the twentieth time, "I keep wondering how it came about."

He spent all his spare time now—it was not much—in the vine pergola, and he was picking out the ripe grapes from a bunch as he answered her.

"I don't. I had been thinking about you a lot; and then I was tired—really done!"

"What an excuse for falling in love," she protested half-vexedly; "but I should like to know."

He came over to her and put his arm round her waist.

"How can I tell, sweetest? I had been thinking, as I said, a lot about you—and missing a lot—stockings, and all that"—his smile was charm itself; "then, when I saw your dear old head bob up all shaven and shorn——!" he kissed it deliberately, and she laughed.

"For all that," she persisted, "I should like to understand."

"My dearest dear," he replied, "you are such a beggar for wanting to know and understand. Now I, my dear Marmie—I'm too happy to want to know anything! I'm content with what I have—and you are content, too, you know you are!"

There was no denying the fact. Content, indeed, was no word for the feeling that you were rapt away from the very possibility of care. There, in the very shadow of

the grave, overlooking the Lake of Death, those two lovers found their joy enhanced by the uncertainty of life.

"I was chief mourner at six funerals this morning," Marmaduke would say sadly. "As fine fellows as ever stepped. Sometimes I wonder, darlingest, if I ought to come to you——"

"You can bring no more harm to me than I am in already," she would reply. "I am in the thick of it here. Indeed, I was wondering if I ought to let you come."

"Let me!" he would echo derisively. "As if you could stop me."

And in truth there was no gainsaying him, for Marmaduke, easy-going as a friend, was an imperious lover.

After he left her in the dawns Marrion would take out the pocket Shakespeare she had brought with her and, sitting out under the purpling vines, read how the immortal lovers parted.

"I am content so thou wouldst have it so."

She had never before realised that so lay the very essence of love. No plannings, no cuttings, no contrivings. All things simplified, clarified.

It was a wonderful fortnight. The fire, after a brief recrudescence, died down, leaving the slums of the city in ruins, but purified. So cholera, most mysterious of diseases, abated, disappeared from the town; and even in the camps, exposed to the miasma of the Lake of Death, was shorn of half its terrors. And there was a stir as of coming life in the military backwaters. Marmaduke, his face alight, would say that the one thing needful to perfect happiness must be close at hand; for

that was the curious thing about finding yourself in love—you wanted to be up and doing all the time.

And so one day when, instead of Marmaduke, Andrew Fraser—long since let into the secret of Maryam Effendi—appeared with a note, Marrion tried to echo Romeo's words without any reservations, and to be content if he would have it so. For the note ran as follows :

“HEART'S DELIGHT,

“The news has come! We are off to the Crimea. I feel that for the first time in my life I am going to have my chance—or, rather, we are going to have our chance, for I shall take you with me, never fear. I wish, dear, your real body were small enough to go into my knapsack, but the heart that beats under this uniform coat is large enough to hold your love. I must be very busy, but I will find time in a day or two for perfect happiness.

“Yours ever,

“MARMADUKE.

“P.S.—I must get you to box my ears before I go. It will keep me straight and make me what England expects.—M. M.

“P.P.S.—Andrew says he is taking my stockings for you to mend. Forgive us poor men bodies.—M.”

So she sat darning the stockings and trying to prevent a sinking at the heart.

From her verandah she could see the bustle and stir in the camp. The next day one of the meadow stretches lay bare of tents. So the work of embarkation must be close at hand. Aye, the bay was thronged with transports! There was a sound of drums and fifes in the air.

What room for love and peace when war and strife were afoot? But any moment now might bring Marmaduke, and that was enough for the present.

It was on the fourth day, when she was beginning to wonder if possibly he had not found time, that an orderly appeared with a note. It was not from Duke; it was from Andrew.

“DEAR MADAM,

“Please come. I have sent the Colonel’s charger. He will carry a lady. He is very ill.”

She turned soul-sick as she read.

“Is he—is the Colonel very ill?” she asked.

“Verra ill indeed, m’m. It’s the co-lira, and they’re sayin’ he’s like to dee—God forbid it!”

“Like to die!”

Well, it was best to know the truth. She put on her European dress and started, remembering as she rode through the flower-set meadows how they had planned this visit to his hut. How she should spend the day there and be introduced to his friends. For though they never spoke of the future or the past, living only in the present heaven, Marmaduke had evidently never considered the possibility of separation and she had been content to let such possibilities slide.

And now? She bit her lip to keep it from quivering as Andrew met her.

“He’s lying in the harbour, m’m. And he’s no worse, anyway.”

Yes, there he was, lying—such a long length—on his camp-bed covered with his plaid. Lying under the harbour of Jonah’s gourd, about which he had chattered

so gaily as being a laughing-stock to the other officers, though they dearly loved to sit in its shade. The ripe fruit hung scarlet amid the yellowing leaves. It seemed to throw the blue pallor of his face into louder warning that Death was in grips with Life.

She knelt beside the bed and took his hand without one word. She had seen too many cholera cases to hope for speech, but the eyelids quivered and the fingers closed on hers.

"How long?" she asked.

"Since yesterday morning. He would not give in—we were to move to-night, ye see——"

"Why didn't you——?" Words failed her for reproach.

"He wouldna let me send. I'm thinking he was afraid for ye."

There was a long pause. Her heart was full of regret, of bitterness. Afraid for her—oh, Duke, Duke!

"And he has everything?"

"Aye, everything! The doctor will be here again the now."

He came and found his patient better. He opened his eyes and smiled. Collapse had gone, the following fever had laid hold on him. Would his heart stand it? All that day he lay in something like sleep—quiet, so long as his hand could find that other hand. Once or twice she caught a whispered word of command and once, urgent, came a call for reinforcements. His mind was at battle—far, far from her. About an hour before sunset he turned his head and looked at her.

"I've done it," he said faintly; "I've done it!"

The doctor came in many a time and oft. The order-

lies were always doing something; but her part was to hold his hand until the last. She saw it coming clearly; she knew that it must be so.

Someone in the arbour suggested a clergyman, and they sent to fetch one.

"He will be too late," half-whispered a voice.

Was it hers? Too late! As if it mattered? As if He who made——

Hark! A bird singing. It had come in after the fruit—perhaps he had fed it, for he loved God's creatures—and now not five yards from where he lay it was giving its heart out in full-throated song.

Hush! Listen! Listen!—it seemed to say.

The still figure was growing more still.

The slow breathing grew slower.

The touch of these cold fingers on hers grew colder.

Then their feeble clasp had gone, but the bird sang on.

She rose unsteadily, drew the plaid over his face, and left the tent. She did not seem to realise the presence of others.

Andrew ran after her.

"Marrion, Marrion, whaur are ye gaun? Ye poor, poor thing!" he whispered hoarsely in the extremity of his bewildered grief. "Bide a wee, and I'll see ye haim."

"I am going to walk home," she said dully. "It will do me good. I must—I must do something—and I must be alone."

So she walked over the meadows, crushing the drifts of purple colchicum under her feet. What had he called the flower of death? Ah, the iris! That would come in the spring. It would flower on his grave perhaps. And all the time she felt his cold hand on hers, she heard

the bird's full song. How he would have loved to hear it! Perhaps he had.

It was dark ere she reached the vine pergola where they had been so happy, and she started when a tall officer in Highland costume came towards her. Was it all a bad dream? Was she waking to find him still her own? But he was only the bearer of a kindly message from the regiment to say that the colonel was to be buried at dawn, and that if Mrs. Marsden——

"Who told you I was Mrs. Marsden?" she asked sharply. "Andrew Fraser?"

The officer bowed and went on.

"As one of the colonel's oldest friends, would care——"

She shook her head. She was grateful. It was a kind thought. But Colonel Muir was Colonel Muir and everybody loved him—he would have enough friends.

"Madam," said the young officer, with a break in his voice, "when we lower him into his solitary grave—he is to be buried on the hill above his tent where he sat so often—we shall all know that the finest fellow in the regiment, nay, in the whole army, has gone from us."

She lay that night, her face crushed into the pillow without a sob. Only once or twice she whispered to herself.

"Ah, Duke, Duke, I'm glad I made you happy—so glad—so glad!"

She was up betimes to take her stand on a neighbouring hill, where, unobserved, she could watch him laid to his rest. Not a tent was to be seen; the battalion had shifted quarters during the night; the forward march to which he had looked with such longing had begun, and he——

Close by the belt of forest trees she could see his dismantled hut; a heap of packed baggage piled close by with a sentry on guard beside it. But the harbour hid what it held. So, as the sun rose, the leaden beat of the Dead March rose, as the regiment, followed by detachments from all and every regiment in Varna, drew up in a lane to let the artillery with a gun-carriage draped with the colours pass up.

Just his coat, his plaid, his sword, his bonnet, that was all. And after him his grey Arab—the one she had ridden—fully dressed. That was Andrew on the one side, and the other three? Generals, she supposed, by their uniforms.

What a crowd of officers! And the men, marching so slowly to the muffled beat! Would they never reach the grave?

At last. Now there were some words of command—heard vaguely as inarticulate cries—the long procession formed up, massed itself into a hollow square.

They must be reading the service now.

“Being dead yet liveth—yet liveth—yet liveth——”

She held fast to that, as her eyes travelled where his had so often rested in content—thank God for that—in sheer content.

So, as she looked at the wide expanse of hill and valley, lake and sea, those half-heard words of his came back to memory—“I’ve done it—I have done it!”

What had he done?

The sharp rattle of musketry roused her. Again, again! The Last Post had been set. The last honour paid.

A minute’s pause. Then the bands struck up their

regimental marches, orders followed sharp and incisive. So with a swing the men stepped out, only a little knot of officers remaining to see the grave filled in. She must wait till they had gone. Shifting her position to one of greater ease, she rested her aching head upon a tussock of sweet thyme that was shaded by a rugged scarp of rock.

And so, wearied out with her sleepless night, with utter despair and misery she dozed off, sinking deeper and deeper into slumber, all grief forgotten, peaceful as a child. The long hours passed, yet still she slept.

When she awoke it was almost sun-setting. Over the far sea, shadowy outlines and still more shadowy trails of smoke told that the argosy of an army had started for the Crimea. Not a tent was to be seen. They had folded their white wings and gone. Already the populace had cleared away all that had been left behind. The hill-sides showed bare without a trace of humanity. His very hut had disappeared, the arbour was broken down, its scarlet fruits rifled. Only on the mossy plateau below the scarp at her feet lay a heap of stones.

Her heart gave a great throb. She had not thought of that, but a cairn was meet and fitting. And how many men of his regiment had gone there, even amid their busy-ness, to throw one stone for the sake of their love and respect!

She must throw one, too; at least, she could do that!

Her composure was almost terrible. She picked up a little moss-grown quartz pebble, and, going down, laid it where she judged those folded hands of his must rest.

"That's my heart, Duke!" she said. "It's cold—cold as a stone."

Steps behind her made her turn. It was Andrew Fraser, his lean face all blistered with the tears he had shed.

"My puir lammie!" he said. "I thocht I might find you here when you werna at the hoose, and the woman was wae to know what had become o' you."

The very warmth of his sympathy roused antagonism.

"I was just going back. Do you want me?"

He looked at her almost pitifully.

"It'll be no comfort tae you to ken that I'm as fu o' grief as you, Marrion. But I had tae see ye before we left. I got leave till the last. Oh, my lassie, is there naethin' I can do for you?"

She shook her head.

"Nothing, Andrew, except hold your tongue. The past is gone for ever!"

And as she walked down the hill with him her clasped hands bit into each other with bitter strength. Was it for this she had planned and protected? But, thank God, she had made him happy at the last!

CHAPTER VIII

IN after years the next four days appeared to Marrion as a blank. She went on with her work, she shed no tears except when she was asleep. She did not even think. In the late evenings, when work was over, she would ride or drive to where the Highlanders' camp had stood and sit silent for an hour or two on the cairn about Marmaduke's grave, doing nothing. She brought no flowers, the sight of his grave gave her no more poignant grief. Indeed, often as she looked out eastwards over the sea, with all the glorious trending of sunlit, sun-shadowed hills and dales towards it, she would feel calmly that he would have admired it as much as she did.

Yet underneath all her calm lurked a regret that grew with the days.

He had been left behind, and he had been so eager to go. Even those last words of his—"I have done it"—were poor comfort.

So, confusedly, out of this regret and the memory of those other words of his—"I have found you, or rather I have found myself, for ever and ever and ever"—arose the idea of getting to the Crimea herself, if she could. She could at least follow the fortunes of the regiment of which he had been so fond, so proud. Besides, home had no call for her. She had no ties there and the prospect

of a long life without them was appalling. Far better to die out here as he had died. But the interest of Varna had passed. The tragedy of the fire had ousted the tragedy of disease and starvation. The cholera had ceased, the city was almost depopulated, so the problem of many mouths and no food had disappeared.

Once the idea of following the regiment presented itself to her it became an obsession. She made up her mind that if it could be compassed she would do what she could for its brave men; then if death did not intervene—which she hoped it might—she could come back to where Duke lay and tell him she had carried him in her heart all the way. So she set to work to think out the means. Her shaven and shorn head—as he had called it—might facilitate matters; for she might pose as a youth of one of the many uncouth peoples gathered round by greed of gain. Varna was a polyglot place, and she knew enough Turkish now to render English unnecessary.

While still nebulous, however, her plans were suddenly settled for her by the arrival in port of the very Turkish mail steamer in which she had sailed from Marseilles. The little doctor naturally enough called on his *protégée*, full of the fine reports he had heard of her from old Achmet. The ship had been requisitioned and he was on his way to Eupatoria with medical stores for the Turkish contingent, which expected to land there. The opportunity seemed too good to be lost. She begged him to arrange for her to go so far, pointing out that she had proved her capacity for usefulness. After a few demurs he consented. She left everything standing in Varna and three days afterwards found herself surveying the beach at Kalamita Bay, a few miles south of

Eupatoria, which had been taken the night before by the expedition without the exchange of a shot. It was a shingly beach or bar but a few feet wide, behind which lay a long, narrow, sedge-set lake of salt water. From this rose, with deafening clamour, thousands upon thousands of wild fowl alarmed by the unaccustomed presence of man, their wailing cries almost drowning the long surge of the sea upon the shingly beach and the oaths and confusion inseparable from the disembarkation of so many troops. Beyond this salt lake rose a high bank of red clay serrated by many small ravines, while over this again the wide plain, dotted with cattle, corn-ricks, and farmhouses, showed a land where supplies should be plentiful. In the far distance could be seen, dimly blue, the hills behind Sebastopol, which lay some seven and twenty miles to the south. In deference to the little doctor's recommendation she remained on board and was thus free to watch the humour and difficulties of the disembarkation. Both were numerous. The heavy surf made the passage of boats to the shore dangerous, but the blue-jackets were over the sides almost before they could foot bottom, and, aided by those landed before—who, naked as the day they were born, rushed into the sea to help—generally succeeded in beaching their cargo high and dry. To little purpose, so far as the men were concerned, since it was “off uniform” in a second, and into the water to help the next arrivals. Luckily the day was sultry and warm. The landing of the cavalry horses presented the greatest difficulty, for even after confinement on shipboard the dry shingle was not sufficient bait to induce them to walk the plank alone; so that they had to be ridden, and as three out of six went souse into the sea it was provoca-

tive of much merriment—for even in those days the British soldier was light-hearted. The men, therefore, wrung their wet clothes out cheerfully, and the horses dried themselves by rolling in the patches of sun-baked sand, for the day was glorious. Yet the discomfort was hard, the work harder; but, despite it all, Thomas Atkins found time to nickname the Crim-Tartar population who came down, curious but friendly, to view the scene, by the strangely inappropriate and colourless appellation of “Joey,” one which nevertheless stuck firm all through the Crimean War.

So the day passed; but the afternoon promised a storm, and Marrion was anxious to get on shore and make arrangements, if she could, for stopping there. As she was watching she saw a gig going ashore to the Old Fort with a woman in it—a woman who was received with plaudits by the whole army. At the time she could not conceive who it could be, though she afterwards found out it was the Countess of Erroll. The incident, however, gave her courage; she persuaded the little doctor to allow her to land, and, accompanied by him and in her Turkish dress, she found a night’s lodging in one of the nearest farm-houses. Nor had she to pay for it overmuch, for the Crim-Tartarians were kindly, honest folk ready to welcome brothers and sisters of Islam. Indeed, they looked upon the new-comers as a possible deliverance from Russian rule. It was lucky this was so, thought Marrion, as with the sinking of day a violent storm of wind and rain swept the beach, drenching the fifty thousand men who were without tents. They dug holes for themselves in the shingle, spread their great-coats atop, and joked away discomfort even though

death stalked among them and the terrible scourge, cholera, they hoped they had left behind them, claimed not a few victims before morning.

They were cheerful as ever, nevertheless, next day while the work of disembarkation went on. Marrion watched it from afar, finding a Varna friend or two in the Turkish contingent, but sheering off from the regiment for fear of recognition—especially by Andrew Fraser. She was not ready for that yet. So three days passed and it was not till the nineteenth that the army of some fifty thousand men moved on towards Sebastopol. About a third of the way thither the enemy was said to be strongly entrenched on the banks of the Alma river. Why he had not attacked during the confusion of disembarkation was a subject of much comment, and all agreed it must be because the position they held on the river was supposed to be impregnable. Why, therefore, leave it?

"We shall see," said Lord Raglan succinctly.

He was an old man, as indeed were almost all the leaders in the Crimean War, but he was full of the fire of youth.

The march was a gay one despite the fact that it was over stony barren steppes; but the hares that started up so often seemed made to be chivied, when, confused, they got between the men's legs, and many a warrior strung one secretly under his knapsack against a savoury supper. And songs were sung, the "Tipperary" of the time, and jokes made with "Joey" who, all along the line, came out affably, ready to trade.

But the sight of the red Alma cliffs that had to be stormed on the morrow sobered some, and Marrion, from

another farmhouse where she had obtained shelter, watched the evening sun redden them still more, and thought of the blood that would be shed on them tomorrow with sick loathing.

It was grey dawn when she rose, slipped on a youth's dress she had brought with her, and, packing a few necessaries in a small bundle, waited for the *réveillé*. But none came. On that fateful morning of the 20th September, 1854, the whole force of twenty thousand British bayonets and sabres assembled in silence. For a watchful enemy awaited them beyond the sluggish tortuous river that wound its way to the sea amid sparse vineyards. Far away to the right the horizon of open sea showed a massing of grey hulks and twinkling lights. That was the Fleet ready to aid as it could. Further afield, beyond the debouching of the cliffs, seven thousand Turkish troops prevented a flank attack. Then came the French twenty thousand face to face with the most formidable part of the cliff nearest the sea. After that the British. Marrion, through her spy-glass, could see the Highlanders standing, their faces set and determined. This was to be their first brush with the enemy, and many of them had waited for it so long. Eight months since Duke had brought her news of battle in the little London house! And now he lay in his solitary grave while his men fought.

Still silence. It was past nine o'clock now, and the troops stood motionless as if on parade. Here and there, in low scrub on the opposite bank, an enemy's battery showed, ready no doubt for instant action on the firing of the first shot. And, every now and then, bayonet-points and the heads of men seen for a second or two

against the sky-line, told of infantry ready to receive attack. But there were no skirmishers, no attempt to force on strife.

"No possible advance there," said the Chief of the Staff at the war council that was being held in the open, as he pointed on the map to the cliffs facing the sea. "I wish there were, for, so far as I can see, Menschikoff has left it unguarded."

A Colonel of the Zouaves looked critically at the contours, then turned to the Marquis St. Arnaud—

"My children are good climbers, sir; may we not try?"

"They shall," replied the French Commander-in-Chief. So the attack was ordered. On the extreme right, the French were to throw out skirmishers, tackle the cliff, charge over the first narrow plateau, and so, up the next bank, reach the plain above. Then, when the attack in flank had really commenced, the British would deliver a frontal one.

As he rode back to his own lines the Marquis St. Arnaud paused to take the British salute with the words, "I hope you will fight well to-day." To which came rapid reply in a voice from the 56th Regiment—"Don't you know we will?"

Whereat in long rolling reverberations from company to company, from battalion to battalion, rose a deafening cheer. It was the first sound of the battle of the Alma.

And hark! A disconnected rattle of rifle shots! The skirmishers are out among the rocks; and now, like goats up invisible paths, their full red pantaloons redder than the red clay, the Zouaves show in single file—here, there, everywhere like streamlets of blood. Incredible

pluck! Astounding agility! But they are up. The first vantage ground is gained; they pause to collect the skirmishers and sound the *pas de charge*—that muffled pulse beat that, throbbing destruction, grows louder and louder and louder, drowning all but sheer lust of blood.

On they go, only to receive the fire from a Russian battery posted above.

So the advance goes on, but it goes slower. That salvo on the Zouaves opened the ball, and now, trundling among the ranks of the British, come round shot and shrapnel, dealing death and disablement.

The *pas de charge* continues, but it is perforce slow.

"Pass the order to lie down," says Lord Raglan; and, obedient, though straining at the leash, the British troops lie down while the enemy's shot fall among them still dealing death and disablement at every round.

"How goes the French attack?" he queries hastily, as an aide-de-camp dashes up at 1.50 p.m.

"They are across and up, sir, but not sufficiently established to warrant our starting."

Lord Raglan fumes. His blood was up, his men were being shot at without reply.

"Give the order for general advance," he said, staking all, rashly enough, on the hazard of brave troops; but if he staked rashly he staked wisely. The serried masses of men rose with ringing cheers, dashing on through a belt of fire from the opposite heights, floundered somehow through the river, and paused for a second to take breath in the vineyards below the steeps. But formation had been lost. It was sheer onslaught. At the head of the advance rode Lord Raglan himself, regardless of the gaps in his Staff. Sir George Brown,

leading the Light Division, goes down in a cloud of dust before a Russian battery. "Go on, 23rd," he shouts; "I'm all right, but be sure I'll remember this day, boys!"

Further to the left Colin Campbell in front of the Highlanders calls back to them: "Keep yere fingers frae the triggers, men, till ye're within a yaird o' them." And they did. Colin Campbell's horse is down under him, but he is up again charging a battery on foot and calling to the Guards who came up in support, "We want nane but Hie'land bonnets here." But the Guards were firm. Steady, in even line, without a waver in the black bearskins, they came on resistless, making one man in the Light Division mutter under his breath, "D—— them, wasting time in dressing up as if they were on a parade ground!" For all that they had stormed the right end of the most powerful battery almost before the Highlanders had got in on the left. A few minutes later the 1st and 2nd divisions crowned the crest. The French, finding their objective, turned their own guns upon the flying enemy. There were a few faint struggles by the infantry, a few more rounds of artillery, and the Russians were in full flight, leaving over four thousand dead and wounded on the battlefield. So Alma's heights were won, but at a cost which saddened the victory; for out of a total of fourteen thousand British troops employed, one thousand four hundred, or one in ten, were dead or wounded. The French had suffered as much, so General Canrobert's face was grave as he rode up at the close of the day to exclaim: "I ask of Fortune but this! May I command an English corps for three short weeks, then could I die happy."

And the English commander's voice was graver still as he replied : " I could not command a French corps. They would outpace me." And in truth the Zouaves' rapid, flame-like spread from crag to crag, their ceaseless fusillade meanwhile, had been all-astonishing and had paralysed the foe completely. But now the laurel wreath of victory was fading, the cypress garland of death was taking its place. It had been a three hours' hand to hand infantry battle, and the late September sun was sinking when the living turned to look after their fallen comrades, for in those days ambulance corps were in their infancy and Red Cross was not. The wounded soldier lay as he fell, dying, mayhap for want of care, even for a drink of water. There were hundreds such upon the heights they had won, as Marrion Paul, taking advantage of the fast coming darkness, began her round. She was provided with water, brandy, a few simple ligaments and bandages. At Varna she had had not a few wounded Turkish soldiers from the Danube in old Achmet's hospital; but this was different. There the wounds seemed a disease; here you felt the keen horror of cold steel and rifle bullet close at hand; you realised the futility, the wickedness of it. She avoided the salients where the dead and wounded lay thickest, for there help was already being given, and men were going to and fro with stretchers; but in one or two of the little gullies she found someone to tend until, darkness closing, she became more brave, and lighting the little lamp with which she had provided herself, she ventured more into the open. Here it was pitiful; the dead lay in clusters, their faces as a rule upturned to the stars. The stretcher-bearers had come and gone, leaving behind

those to whom they were useless—as yet. She knelt beside one dead man and wiped away a blood stain from his forehead. He had been orderly once to Duke. Poor soul! Some woman would doubtless wish she had been in her, Marrion's, place. And now the whole hill-side was lit up by wandering lights, the lights of men searching for their bosom friends, for their officers. But there were other lights, too, though she did not think of them as different—the lights of the pilferers, the carrion crows, who crept about to rifle dead men's pockets. There were more of them here on the level where the dead and wounded Russians lay in heaps; some, supported by the bodies of others, remained still in the attitude of firing, their rifles still in their hands, their faces curiously peaceful. Well, they had died doing their duty.

A faint call came from a man who lay, his head half-resting on the breast of a dead comrade. She turned to him at once, throwing her lamp-light on his face. Extraordinarily good-looking, so young, so near death. She saw these things at a glance, guessing he was shot through the lungs as his breath came in soft pitiful gasps. She knelt to offer him a drink, but he shook his head. Evidently his eyes were already dim, for he whispered in broken English: "Good—gentlemens—take—take—my heart." She leaned closer to catch his words, thinking bitterly as she did so that he took her for his enemy—his enemy—while her whole heart was going out in pity for such as he.

"I don't understand," she said tenderly. "Your heart—what do you mean?"

"My heart," he gasped painfully—"here!" And his

limp arm, lying helplessly beside him, crooked itself in supreme effort, and the hand fell on his breast.

A sudden comprehension came to her.

"You want me to take something from your heart?"

His dim eyes smiled faintly.

"Yes—good gentlemens," he whispered; it was almost a sigh, but it held content. "Take—give!"

She understood now, though a faint shiver through the young body told her that the speaking soul had gone. Here again was Love transcending Death! Quietly she laid down the head she had been supporting, closed the eyes, and opening the grey tunic began her search, her mind rapt away from her surroundings by thoughts of Duke. Her hand had just found a thin chain, when a rough clutch was laid on her shoulder and she was wrenched to her feet with such force that the chain giving way left her standing with something hanging from her hand.

"Caught in the act!" said a rough voice. "Shoot the young devil, sergeant!"

Something cold touched her forehead. Her heart gave a great bound. Was this death—oh, Duke—Duke!

The flash of a bull's-eye lantern turned full on her showed her face deadly pale but firm.

"Hold hard!" cried another voice hastily. "The fellow carries a water-bottle—of our pattern, too! Give the devil his due, Mac."

She could see faintly now. They were Highlanders; a search party evidently, and the blood rushed back to heart and face.

"I'm doing no harm!" she cried hotly. "He asked me—to take and give—his heart."

At her first word the cold nozzle of the revolver had left her forehead.

"By God!" came in a murmur; but for the most part the little group of men were startled out of speech and stood staring at the figure before them, holding out in apology what it held.

It was only a pinchbeck locket with a woman's face in it—a pinchbeck locket in the form of a heart.

"What the devil are you doing here in that kit, you young oaf?" said an angry voice at last. "I as nearly shot you as a carrion crow as ever——" It paused; something in the situation seemed to bring silence. The stars overhead, the dead lover at their feet, the tall, slim mysterious figure holding out the symbol of something that had survived death.

"You had better go on, Mac," said the voice that had advised caution, finally breaking the stillness. "I will use this young fool's lantern and that will make two search parties. We have little time to spare. I'll see him safe. You'd better take the orderlies with you. They have appliances and will know what to do. I can manage."

"As you please, doctor," came the reply.

When they had gone the man they had called doctor took up Marrion's lantern and seemed to examine its light, turning it finally full on his face; and suddenly he spoke.

"Mrs. Marsden——" Marrion could not avoid a start.

"Mrs. Marsden!" she echoed faintly.

"Yes. You don't recognise me evidently. Indeed, I doubt if you ever saw me, but I was with poor Muir when he died. Andrew Fraser had to tell me—something—before I would let you come, and your face and hair aren't easily forgotten. I guess why you are here; but it isn't safe—in fact, it's impossible; but if you will go back now and come to my hospital—Dr. Forsyth—in English dress, please—I think I can settle you to work—something that will prevent your being taken for a Crim-Tartar thief," he added grimly. "It's lucky I have a good memory for faces."

"I don't think I should have cared," said Marrion, but he took no notice of her defiance.

"As for this poor chap," he knelt down beside the Russian and laid his hand over the heart. "Dead as a door nail, ceased to beat—wonder where he wanted to send it. Is there a name at the back?"

Marrion bent to the light.

"A name and an address."

The doctor jumped up lightly.

"Being dead he yet speaketh," he remarked cheerfully. "Now if you will please go back I will go on. We have to find poor Grant; he was last seen on the crest leading his men, with Andrew Fraser—the colonel's servant, you remember—just behind him."

"Andrew!" exclaimed Marrion, with a sort of sob. "Is he killed, too?"

"Killed or missing," called Dr. Forsyth, as he turned away to rejoin his party.

CHAPTER IX

THE scene which met Marrion's eyes when soon after daybreak she went over to the hospital tents beggars description. The wounded, many of them as yet untended, lay almost in heaps, stretcher-bearers were hurrying along, slipping on the clotted blood from many wounds, carrying those who had been seen to and could be moved to the boats for removal to Scutari. There was a low inarticulate wail of moaning in the air, broken by sudden screams of pain. Two or three women were busy giving water, trying to soothe pain, and now and again a doctor with bare arms incarnadined with blood passed hurriedly to more work.

"It is worse than I expected," said Dr. Forsyth over his shoulder to Marrion. "Do what you can, will you?"

And she did, wondering vaguely that she had not noticed that curious face when she had first seen it; the eyes alone were so unlike any she had ever seen before—greeny gold, with a dark rim round the iris. A hawk's eye, surely!

"Mrs. Marsden, I want you," came an imperative voice half an hour later, "follow me."

He was there again, and she followed him blindly into a small tent.

"The ambulance and stores have been left behind

somewhere," he said bitterly. "God damn them! We have no chloroform left—they only served us out a thimbleful, though Simpson demonstrated its absolute necessity seven years ago—curse the lot—and now a case has just come in. It's life or death and the others won't touch it, but I will. See here, I was with Esdaile in India and I know it can be done. If only I haven't the seats of the scornful by me—I think you'll believe—you haven't your face for nothing, and I must have help. Give it me?"

He held out his thin nervous hands, so strangely full of grip, as he spoke; his eyes found hers and held them.

"I will give you what I can," she said at once.

"That's right!" he replied, his buoyancy back in an instant. "But you will need all your nerve, I tell you. Now help me to get the poor fellow into position."

"Let me die, doctor," moaned the patient, who lay on the doctor's truckle bed. "It is agony to move."

"No, it isn't!" replied Dr. Forsyth firmly. "You are making a mistake. You have no pain, at least not much, and you are going to lose it altogether soon. There! That's more comfortable, isn't it?"

He was busy now arranging knives and instruments on a clean towel.

"I've put them in the order I shall want them," he whispered, "and don't be in a hurry—I shall want time. Now I'm going to mesmerise him. You'll see he will pass into a deep sleep and feel no pain—none at all."

It was almost as if he were assuring himself that it would be so. An atmosphere of quiet confidence seemed to emanate from him.

Marrion found herself watching his passes with abso-

lute faith, listening to the quiet monotonous voice with absolute belief.

"Now you are really feeling better—you are inclined to sleep—if you close your eyes you will go to sleep."

On and on went the voice insistently. The breathing grew slower, less convulsive; the eyelids closed, and all the time the doctor's face was as the face of the Angel of Death—kind, but relentless.

"Now we can begin," he said at last, resuming his quick decision. "You won't faint, will you?" he added doubtfully, with a glance at Marrion's pale cheek.

"I don't think so," she replied; "but *that* seemed to hurt here." She swept her hand across her forehead.

He scanned her narrowly.

"Umph!" he said, half to himself. "You'll make an excellent *aide*, I expect. So now to business."

It was an awful operation. One impossible while consciousness remained; but possible enough with the absolute stillness and lack of hurry that unconsciousness brings.

And so far it was successful.

"He will sleep for some hours yet," said Dr. Forsyth, as he sorted his implements. "You needn't stay with him all the time. Make yourself useful elsewhere, but look in and bring me word when he wakes."

There was not one word of thanks; only as he left the tent he paused to say—

"The lad was a great favourite of the colonel's. I'm glad we saved him."

All that day Marrion lived in a dream of death; but those words went with her. Yes, she was glad she had helped to save the lad, but how much had she helped?

Three full days passed before she could get an answer to that question. Days of grim determination to keep her head—not to give way as some, even of the men, gave way. It was like living in a shambles. She thought, amazed at the poverty of her own imagination, on the dread with which she had first viewed the heights of Alma. But this—this was inconceivable, unutterably beastly! Vaguely she felt glad that Duke had been spared it, and with the thought of the singing bird that had sung its little heart out in joy as he lay dying, the first tears she had shed for him came to her eyes. And she worked on with a lighter heart, until the first press and rush was over, till the dead had been buried, the less severe cases shipped off, and tents found for the others.

Then Dr. Forsyth sent for her. She found him in his tent. The lad whom they had saved had been removed to a larger one and was doing well. Though the flap was open, the tent was shadowy and the doctor's eyes looked curiously light as he sat on the bed and motioned her to a seat beside him.

"You have done very well, Mrs. Marsden," he said shortly, "and I think you will do better. Now I am going to teach you some of the tricks of the trade, and in the next action you will be able to work on your own. Only don't talk about it. I believe all the doctors and most of the men would rather die than be mesmerised; but then they never saw Esdaile's hospital. I have."

"But perhaps I shan't be able," began Marrion.

"Yes, you will," he interrupted steadily, "and to begin with I am going to call you by your right name, please. Marrion Paul."

She flushed.

"Did Andrew——"

"Nothing of the sort. My dear woman, I'm an Aberdeenshire man. Long years ago, when I was a lad, I was at Drummuir and I saw your father—possibly you also. No?—His was a face and figure you can't easily forget. And I know the story. I heard Andrew, the Drummuir's henchman, call you Marrion; your extraordinary likeness to your father supplied the cues. And I was right, you see." His face was all smiles at his own perspicacity. "Now, my mother was a Pole and I believe your father was one. And that admixture seems favourable to a certain force of character. You've always managed people—at least, I guess so—and it is just that trick of suggestion that you require for management—at least, so I think—that I want. Anyhow, we will try. For the present the tyranny is overpast. We have wormed our way through *sans* everything; but the next action will be as bad, perhaps worse. I think the letters we have written home about the scandalous state of affairs may have had some effect—God knows! We British sleep through a lot of bad dreams, but help can't be here in time. And the stores they are landing! My God, if you could see them! Rotten biscuits, putrid meat, drugs unusable! How the devils in hell will kow-tow to the contractors when they get them as past-masters of damnation. "Anyhow, in the immediate future we have to depend on ourselves, and if I can depend on you——" he looked at her and once more stretched out those thin capable hands of his. "Come, is it a bargain?"

She could not but say "Yes," and from that day he

treated her as a professor might treat his pupil—kindly, but autocratically.

"You are the only person who ever made me obey orders," she said, half-resentfully one afternoon when he had driven her to rest in his tent.

"Better for you if it had happened before," he replied curtly. "You strike me as a woman who has managed too much. Do you know how old I am?" he asked suddenly.

Seated as he was just outside the hut so that he could talk to her within, he looked strangely young, but the grey hair and bronzed wrinkles about his clean shaven face made her venture rather against her own judgment—

"Fifty."

"Sixty-five," he replied.

"You don't look forty-five," she put in.

"No. That is because I never look ahead. I take what comes. If you believe, as I do, in a Divinity that shapes our ends, it's waste of time to hew. I learnt that early in life. You haven't learnt it yet. Well, now I've got to go and cut a man's leg off."

And he went, leaving her wondering if he was right. All her life had been spent in keeping Duke for the heirship of Drummuir, and now he lay in his solitary grave at Varna. The pity of it was coming home to her.

So after a few days, with a tent provided for her, she rode in a baggage waggon towards Sebastopol. Cholera had begun again badly. The fillip which the idea of campaigning and free fighting had given to men jaded by hot weather and the discomforts of Varna was passing off. As they neared the Russian town supplies were less easily obtainable, and the commissariat was conspicuous

by its inefficiency. The army, meanwhile, starting on the 23rd, had found itself brought up seriously at the next river. The enemy had established a work at the entrance which made it impossible to use the bay, as had been hoped, for a base. There was nothing for it but to change plans and act promptly. And here, mercifully, was no delay, no mistakes. Forsaking the sea-coast the whole force plunged boldly into the mountains, marching by compass, without road, without guides. Much of the way lay through dense forest—there was no water; but, heartened up by a small brush with a wandering division of the enemy, the men struggled on cheerful as ever, up hill, down dale, during a long and toilsome march from dawn till after nightfall on the 25th. But then came solace. On the sea-coast below them—secure, unprepared—lay the town and harbour of Balaklava, seven miles to the east of Sebastopol. They had circumvented the enemy, they had taken him round the corner! But there must be no cheering. Quiet as mice they lay among the barberry scrub, waiting for the dawn of the 26th. And then there was nothing to be done save to walk down and take possession—take possession of both sea and land, for, punctual to the moment, her Majesty's ship *Agamemnon* sailed into the harbour, decks clear, guns ready for action—a stroke of luck due to young Maxse who, arriving at the Commander-in-Chief's with despatches the evening before, volunteered to brave the forest again by night and tell his Admiral to come round as sharp as he could.

So when the hospital tents and such medical stores as there were arrived from Kalamita Beach they found the troops elated and pleased with their new quarters.

As is generally the way after a move, cholera abated, almost disappeared, and for a time the weather was good.

Trench work began at once, yet progressed but slowly. Whether, as some say, from lack of implements or from slackness in command, the French had placed thirty-three siege guns before the English had finished their fifteenth; and the doctor, coming in from a long round, would shake his head and say that the business would be a longer one than people thought.

And what was to be done with winter coming on—blankets wearing out, a shortage of drugs, and the very ambulance-waggons still lying forgotten on Kalamita Beach?

He used to watch the ships sailing in so gaily to the harbour and say calmly, "I wonder what filth, what fraud, they bring?"

Still, even he grunted satisfaction over the news that Britain was beginning to discover that all was not well with the Crimean expedition—that there was talk of sending out nurses and more doctors. So for nigh three weeks comparative peace reigned. There were no shambles, and Marrion had time to pick up many wrinkles of nursing from her patron; he taught her how to bring sleep for one thing, the first duty of those who tend the sick. She had time also for regret. Nothing had been heard of Andrew Fraser, though Captain Grant's body had been duly found. It seemed to her as if the last link with the old life had gone, and one day in sudden confidence she said as much to the doctor. Again he shook his head.

"My dear good woman," he remarked, "no one ever

gets away from their past. It is what the Easterns call '*karma*.' You have to dree your weird for it always."

"Even if it is not bad?" asked Marrion, feeling hurt at the very idea that a life in which she was conscious of no self-seeking should be a curse to her.

"I don't know," he replied, half-closing his strange eyes, "you may have done something shocking. It is quite possible."

She wondered, afterwards, what had induced her to tell him what she had done; but these strange fits of confidence are one of the psychological puzzles of humanity. Tell him she did, however, while he sat looking out over the sea with his veiled eyes, for they were sitting on the heights and the whole panorama of Sebastopol, the Allied Fleets, and the investing forces lay before them.

"What would you have done if Colonel Muir had lived?" he asked briefly when she had finished.

She blushed a little.

"I have often wondered," she began.

"People who play Providence ought not to wonder. Well, I am glad he died happy. That, at any rate, is to your credit." So he rose and left her.

The days passed rapidly, full to the brim of work, and every day brought her more and more admiration for the courage and cheeriness of the men, more and more resentment at the ghastly way in which they were treated by the authorities at home. Boots had already given out, none were available in store, and in a whole officers' mess only one subaltern had a holeless pair. And he was the son of a widow who had half-ruined herself by sending her darling the two separate boots of a pair by

letter post. She would have held it worth more, could she have seen his face of pride among his comrades.

On the night of the 18th of October a diversion arose which, when it was over, caused much amusement.

A party of sappers and miners, losing their way, fell into a Russian picket, which, possessed by the idea of a general assault, incontinently skedaddled into the town and raised the alarm, thereby causing much beating of drums and bugle calls. The Allied armies, alarmed in their turn, instantly stood to arms, while gun after gun boomed from the city forts, echoing and re-echoing among the reverberating rocks. After an hour or two, however, the gunners seemed to recognise that they were only, so to speak, shooting at their own shadows or echoes, and gradually peace reigned, broken by roars of laughter round many a camp fire.

But on the 25th something serious happened which brought the shambles close once more. To the Turkish contingent had been assigned the redoubts which protected the heights behind the entrenchments. On the morning of the 25th the Russians, numbering some twenty thousand troops, after following the same route by which the Allies had reached Balaklava, appeared unexpectedly before these redoubts. The Turks abandoned them without striking a blow and fled down the valley to the plain in sheer panic. Nor did a volley from the 93rd Highlanders, hastily formed up, stop them. For a short while confusion and courage were conspicuous. The British, taken unawares, fought like heroes. Finally there followed the famous Light Cavalry Charge of which the French general, watching it, said "*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre.*"

By whose fault the order was given for a deed which will stir the blood at every English heart even at the day of doom, Heaven only knows. The man who brought it was the first to fall. Briefly told—it needs no grand words—it amounted to this. Six hundred men and horses charged uselessly, desperately, defiantly, *because they were told to do so*, down an open valley exposed to a cross fire from guns posted on either side of them, and to a frontal fire from the evacuated and abandoned forts. The charge commenced at 11.10. It was barely 11.35 when a hundred and sixty men, many of them wounded, rode back, having done what they were told to do. The rest lay on the field.

But it was a victory for all that, and when night came, bringing an hour or two of rest to Marrion, she spent it in going round with a revolver she borrowed from Dr. Forsyth and putting wounded horses out of their pain.

“Don’t forget to give them their password,” he said, as he gave the weapon to her.

She looked at him uncomprehending.

“I forgot you hadn’t lived in the East,” he went on, with a smile. “Say ‘In the name of the Most Merciful God’ before you shoot.”

Once again there were tears in her eyes. She was learning much of this strange man who looked on death so lightly, yet spent himself in striving to evade it.

It was a busy time again after Balaklava; she had barely time to think, scarcely time to rest. Yet ever and always, when her mind travelled beyond the immediate present, those words with which Dr. Forsyth had replied to her story came back to remembrance—

“People who play Providence ought not to wonder.”

Was he right, she wondered, and then was ashamed of her own wondering.

"You will have to rest a little more," said the doctor to her one day when she had been helping him. "You were quite wobbly just now. You will be of no use, you know, unless you pull yourself together." And he narrowed his eyes perplexedly. "You are not living in the present somehow—you're reaching out to the future. Why?"

She laughed.

"Why should I—what can the future hold for me! I will take a blue pill."

He grunted dissatisfaction, but was too busy to say more. Yet what he said was true. She began to catch herself wondering, wondering. The present was all-engrossing, of course; how could it be anything else when she could do what she could do for the poor lads?—his poor lads, who were so brave, so cheery. And then her mind would become vagrant, and she would wake up from dreams with a start.

It was one day just before Inkerman, the 10th of November, that Dr. Forsyth came to her and said:

"I want you. It's over at the cavalry hospital."

His eyes seemed to her stranger than ever, and when she came out of her tent to join him he glanced at her, then said brusquely:

"You've forgotten to put on that diamond brooch of yours—the P.P. one. Don't you remember when the sun glints on it, it's useful?"

It was true. Often and often the eyes that had been asked to fix their gaze on it had become full of dreams, and then slept.

"Stupid of me," she replied lightly. "I'll put it on!"

CHAPTER X

THE Cavalry Hospital was a little way out of the town, a quaint old place with oleanders and orange trees set in tubs outside its white verandahs. As they drove thither Dr. Forsyth told her something of the case in which he wanted her help. It was a prisoner, presumably an officer, but he refused name or rank. He had been found two days after the battle, lying, with one leg smashed to bits, under his dead horse in a little ravine. How he had lived was a marvel, for he was quite an old man; but, not only had he done so, he had also retained consciousness, and had addressed those who found him in perfect English, congratulating them courteously on their marvellous exploit, and saying he was proud to have crossed swords with them.

A game old fellow, worthy of his hospital nickname "The General." He had actually begged, before they moved him, that someone would be good enough to search in the holster of the dead horse beside him for a gold snuffbox which he had been unable to reach, and the lack of which had, he asserted, been his greatest discomfort.

"He has been snuffing away ever since," added the doctor, "so perhaps he was right, for his leg was almost too crushed to belong to him. We took it off at once; but now gangrene is setting in and if he is to be saved we must have it off higher up. And the others won't

risk it. He is old—heart weak—and they say won't stand chloroform. I am going to try. I've told him and he will take the risk. A good old chap, worth saving. I don't believe he is a Russian. I think he is a Pole, and blood is thicker than water."

Marrion's first look at the patient as he lay propped up by pillows in the small room whither he had been carried made her agree with the doctor.

It was a fine old face, curiously reminiscent of someone she had seen somewhere, with its hint of ruddiness beneath the grey of the hair and its bold bright daring look. And he was very tall; his long length almost outstretched the trestle bed.

"Good morning, doctor!" he said, with a courteous salute which included Marrion, and with a perfect English accent. "You have brought your nurse, I see. Are we to begin at once?"

There was no anxiety in his voice; only gentle raillery.

"Not quite yet, General," replied Dr. Forsyth. "I want you to have a rest and sleep first. You are looking a bit tired; and your pulse"—he stopped to feel it—"is tired, too. So I've brought Nurse Paul to sit with you. She is a curiously soporific person. I shall be back before very long," he added, more to her than to the patient.

Left alone, Marrion went up to the bed, smoothed the rough pillows, straightened the coarse blanket, which was all the bedding Balaklava could produce, and said quietly—

"Now, if you will close your eyes I believe you would sleep."

But those sea-blue eyes—whose did they resemble?—

someone she had seen somewhere—remained wide, and watched her narrowly as she returned to seat herself in the only chair. It was set full in the sunlight, which showed her tall, slender, yet strong in her dark stuff dress, a white handkerchief almost hiding her bright hair and pinned to place by the little brilliant brooch beneath her chin. Truly those keen eyes were over-watchful, and she was about again to suggest sleep when his voice, full of insistent command, startled her.

“Where did you get that brooch?”

She replied at once with the truth.

“It belonged to my father.”

“Indeed—who was he?”

“He was a valet; but if you would only close your eyes I think you would go to sleep.”

“Do you think so? I don’t.”

His eyes showed more awake than ever; there was a hint of a smile on the handsome old face.

Still there was silence for full five minutes, and Marrion was just about to make further suggestion of sleep when once more the voice rose—

“Will you please give me my snuff-box?—it is under my pillow somewhere.”

She drew it out. A plain gold box with—her startled eyes caught the old face—

“Yes!” he said, and his voice had a jeer in it. “‘P.P.,’ as you see. That is my name. So you are Marrion Sim’s child—and I suppose mine. Queer, isn’t it, how these old stories crop up when one had almost forgotten them?” He scanned her face narrowly. “Now you are angry. Why should you be? Your mother was my wife, I suppose. At least, I hadn’t any other then. I

have sons now"—his voice softened as he spoke—"yes, sons to come after me when I am gone, as I shall be soon, for that gay doctor of yours can't conquer Fate; and it is Fate that has brought me here!"

He lay looking at her with a certain kindly curiosity, while she, startled out of herself, tried to realise that this was her father—the father she had condemned and despised all her life.

It seemed almost as if he saw into her thoughts, for his next words touched them.

"Perhaps it was cruel to leave her as I did; but I had no choice. If you have anything belonging to us in you, you'll understand what the call of the master means. And young Muir was never my master. He befriended me, helped me to escape Siberia; but the other—There's a perfect passion of loyalty in our family which you may or may not understand." He paused and a shiver of assent ran through Marrion.

"I—I think I do understand," she said, in a low voice.

Yes, from the very beginning, as a small child, this passion of protection, of loyalty, had been hers. Strange legacy from an unknown father! He smiled content.

"Glad to hear it. You're not a bit like your mother—you're like me, and your brothers—half-brothers, I mean. So I had to go. It was just after the break up of Europe and Napoleon, when half the political refugees came to their own again—and he did amongst others. So I had to go." Again he paused, and for the first time Marrion felt the touch of kinship between them. He had to go; that was just it! She had had to be loyal to Duke. "You are not in the least like your mother," he said again suddenly, "you are like us." Yet again he paused.

"Have you anything you can give me to drink?" he asked. "I have something to say to you, and I feel—limp."

She gave him a restorative and he brisked up. Time was passing, but she had learnt many things during the last month and knew that physical rest would be impossible until the mental rest was assured.

"Don't talk too much," she said. "I think I shall understand—what is it?"

"This box," he said. "It holds—my credentials. There is a false top—see, you press this spring—so."

As he spoke the lid appeared to part in two, disclosing a folded piece of paper.

"Don't read it now—but it will tell you everything. I was on secret service and it was of importance no one should know. It is of importance still. If I hadn't met you I should have said nothing. But now—you'll do me this good turn, I expect—for, after all, I am your father."

A cynical smile curved his lips, his blue eyes met hers in a challenge.

Almost staggered by the strangeness of what was happening, Marrion was yet aware of something deep down in her which gave instant response to this claim upon her.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I will do what you wish—father."

"I am obliged—daughter," he replied lightly. "Of course it is for your eye alone. And now for heaven's sake give me some more of that drink. I feel quite exhausted." He lay back smiling at her. "It is better here," he remarked, "than in the north of Scotland." Then after a pause, "I suppose I ought not to have

married your mother; but she was charming and it was very dull." After that he closed his eyes and slept. The doctor, coming in after an hour, found him still sleeping, while Marrion sat beside the bed holding the gold snuff-box in her hand.

He bent over the slumbering face.

"I don't think there will be any operation," he said quietly. "The others were right. His mind has ceased to insist upon his body surviving and so there is rest. It is well."

Marrion looked up into his wise face.

"How did you guess?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There was no guess," he replied; "you remember I had seen your father. Then your extraordinary likeness. When by chance I saw the famous snuff-box yesterday it became a certainty. For a day I decided to say nothing. Then I saw the old chap was fighting death—putting a strain on himself about something, and I thought you had better have your innings."

He did not ask any questions and she was grateful.

"Perhaps you would like to stay," he added gently. "I don't think he will wake again."

And he did not. As the sunlight faded from the room the old man's breathing became slower and ceased.

Marrion stood looking down on him for a moment before she called for aid. All the time she had been watching she had been thinking, thinking; but she had arrived at nothing. Only deep down in her was a glad feeling of inheritance—a consciousness that the dead man had given her something, something that she held in trust.

Was it only the gold snuff-box, she wondered vaguely, as, back in her own tent, she touched the spring.

"The bearer of this, Prince Paul Pauloffski——" She sat staring at the words.

Prince Paul Pauloffski was her father. Then she was gentle born. Then she need not——

With a rush all the things she need not have done crushed in on her. She buried her face in the pillow as she sat on the edge of her bed and muttered——

"People who play Providence!"

Of a truth the wise man with the strange eyes was right. Your past was *karma*. You could not escape from it.

After a time she sat up and began to decipher the rest. It was in French, the *lingua franca* of Eastern diplomacy. Noble-born, poor, devoted, daring. That was the essence of the credentials. The other paper simply gave the address of the ancestral home and that of two sons in the army. A memorandum as to keys and papers filled up the back of the latter. She replaced them, shut down the spring again, then, remembering she could show no right to the snuff-box for which inquiry was sure to be made, took them out again. Nothing, somehow, seemed to matter now. She had made her mistake, she must suffer.

"You have all you want?" asked Doctor Forsyth, as she handed him the box, and she flushed scarlet. Sometimes he seemed to her too clever—he found out everything, everything!

"Thank you," she replied frigidly.

"Because——well, if you would like to possess it, I could

buy it in for you at the auction. The poor old general is—is unidentified, remember.”

“Yes, he is unidentified,” she assented, remembering her father’s wishes, “but I should like to have it all the same.”

He brought it to her a day or two after.

“That’s your fee,” he said lightly, “you’ve earned it well.”

And he would take no refusal; so she replaced the papers in the secret compartment and put the box away in her satchel against—what? That future which was now always filling her mind. The present seemed hardly to touch her at all. The doctor looked at her critically more than once, but he said nothing.

Then came Inkerman. It was on the 5th of November—almost three months, Marrion told herself, since that wonderful day when Duke’s love had come to her amid flame and fire.

It had been a disturbed night. A noise as of tumbrils had been heard about the city. Was it possible that the enemy was taking advantage of the dense night fog to run in commissariat or even ammunition? Nothing could be done, however, save wait. So as the laggard day broke, the advanced pickets looked keenly ahead. To no purpose. An impenetrable wall of grey mist shut out all beyond a yard or two. Their very comrades looked like shadows of men.

“London partickler,” remarked one sentry, stamping his feet to keep out the chill, for it had been raining all night.

“Not yellor enough, save down Chelsea way. My Gawd! I wish I was ther,” replied the next.

"I wish I wurr anywhere but eight thousand strong on the heights of Inkerman," put in an Irishman. "Begorra, I've bin dhrier in a bog!"

"An' I've been wetter in the watter after the trooties on Don side," evened an Aberdeenshire man sturdily. "Mush me, it's weary wark!"

"An' thim ringing joy-bells for to spite us!" joked the Irishman, as on the cold night air a carillon from every church in the city rang out, echoing amongst the little scrub and wood-set ravines that went to make up the valley of Inkerman. "Will it be a weddin', likely? Begorra, I'd loose off me rifle as a salute if the powdther was dry!"

So through the early dawn the pickets, outwearied, wet through, beguiled the time. And though the dawn brought light, the mist lay thicker than ever. Thick and grey the colour of a Russian's coat.

"Dods, mon!" cried the Aberdeenshire man suddenly, "what's yon?"

Yon was indeed a Russian coat, not one but many, emerging out of the fog not ten yards away.

A sharp volley of musketry followed on the instant. The pickets may have been sodden, but they were no cowards. They fought desperately, retreating inch by inch, the alarm of their rifles telling that sixty thousand Russians were on them surging through the newly awakened camp of eight thousand. It was everyone to the rescue. Not one regiment or two, but every available man. Then followed eight long hours of such desperate fighting as, till then, had never been seen. It was not a battle—it was a hundred battles in one; for every little ravine had its opposing armies, cut off from

the rest by the enveloping mist. Again and again the grey line would advance a yard or two, covered by its superior fire; again and again a ringing British cheer and the point of the bayonet would drive it back a yard or two. Sometimes the fight became a *mêlée* in which the British officers, dealing havoc with their revolvers or swords, cut their way through the dense masses of the enemy. No generalship was possible, each man fought for himself, his Queen, his country, and wrote on the page of history a record of undying pluck and almost incredible personal courage. But the battle of Inkerman is, truly, beyond description. It was a day of countless deeds of daring, of despairing rallies and desperate assaults in the glens, the brushwood glades, the torrent beds of the valley of the Tchernaya river. None knew how the balance swayed and shifted. But a few were aware of the aid given in the nick of time by the six thousand French troops who arrived at the double. None knew whose was the victory till from the Russian ranks came the bugles of retreat. And then, as the mist lifted, the whole hillside showed strewn with corpses. But the eight thousand had kept at bay the sixty thousand. Round Sandbag battery, from which the Guards were driven, and which they retook four separate times, lay fifteen thousand Russian dead, mute evidence of the hand to hand, back to back, relentless tenacity with which the Household Brigade eventually fought their way out of the surrounding masses of the foe. A little further, where a single regiment held at bay over nine thousand Russians, the broken stocks of the rifles showed how, when ammunition was gone, the fight still continued.

“Will anyone be kind enough to lift me off my horse?”

said old General Strangways, when riding to an exposed position in the hope of being able to see something of what his men were doing, a shell literally blew off his leg. And someone lifted him down doubtless; but there were eight generals to be seen to, and close on a hundred and fifty officers.

As the official despatches read—

“It does not do to dwell upon the aspect of the battle-field.” True, indeed, when out of the eight thousand some two thousand six hundred lay dead or wounded among the fourteen thousand Russians for whom they had accounted.

Even Doctor Forsyth’s pale, composed face grew paler, less composed, and Marrion acting as his *aide* could scarcely get through the awful days. She could not work as she wished to work, but neither could she rest. Her whole being seemed to go out in one vast pity for the world, a vast desire to protect, to recreate.

“I am sorry my hand shook,” she said, almost pitifully to the doctor, when she held she had failed to give him all the help she should have done over a young lad who had been brought in badly hurt. “But he seemed so very young. It made me think of the time when all these poor boys were babies in their mothers’ arms, warm, secure, sheltered.”

He looked at her gravely.

“You did very well,” he said. “Not quite so well as usual, perhaps; but better than others. For all that, I am going to send you for a rest—only a week or two,” he added hastily, seeing her face set in denial. “And it’s as useful as anything else. You know there are quite a lot of soldiers’ wives down in the town. There ought

not to be, of course, but there are—— Why, there is one, at least, in the camp! And one, an Irishwoman, has just died with her third baby—shock—husband killed. And there is no one to see to them and others. You'd better go—you—you like children."

To tell the truth Marrion felt a strange gladness at the thought of them, and the very idea of holding the newborn scrap of humanity in her arms was enthralling.

"For a week," she demurred. "You see I haven't been sleeping well."

So down by the sea in a house built on the very rocks of the harbour she went back to woman's normal life and rested for a while.

For the first time she had leisure to notice the beauties of the cliff-set coast, of which the bay was a mere shallow curve. The vessels lying at the roads bobbed and swayed when the wind ruffled the water, almost as if they had been at sea. But it was fine to see them there; ships of the line, merchantmen, gun-boats, mail-steamers, all coming and going. When the two elder children were asleep, Marrion would wrap the infant in a blanket and go and sit on the rocks in the sunshine, watching the boats go backwards and forwards to the shore, and thinking of the far-off Aberdeenshire days when she could pull an oar with any man. The harbour itself, a mere inlet, was crammed with vessels of all descriptions; you could scarcely distinguish one from the other, but the thirty outside showed bravely.

"They say the anchorage is very treacherous," remarked Doctor Forsyth, when he came to see how she was getting on, one evening. "I hear that a captain of one of the transports has reported it dangerous; and has

been reprimanded for his trouble. He may have a chance of proving himself right, for the barometer is going down steadily, I'm told; and there is an uncanny feel in the air."

That was about six o'clock in the evening. But the night was calm, warm for the time of the year. It was in the small hours of the 14th that someone relieving watch on one of the ships looked again at the barometer.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "it has fallen two inches in the watch."

Something was astir and the something came with appalling suddenness, almost before the light spars could be shipped and things made taut. And then? What was it? No storm ever seen equalled this boiling cauldron of a sea, this furious blast of bitter wind that lashed the waves of foam and sent them in driving clouds far over the heights. The hawsers, the anchor chains, the cables strained and wrenched and strained, while brave men, looking at the wicked rocks seen dimly by the breaking dawn, knew that their only chance of life lay in the holding of their anchors. An American ship was the first to go. She drifted swiftly to the cliffs and disappeared, timbers and crew. The next to follow was the ship whose captain had given the warning. It made a brief fight for life. The port anchor held—masts, rigging, were cut away. To no purpose. The cable parted, she drifted broadside to the cliff, crashed against it once, twice. A few men were carried by the breakers up the rocks, bruised, mangled. The captain himself was crushed between the rocks and the ship, as he hung from a life-line thrown by those on shore. Another and another and another ship followed in quick succession.

The roar of the tempest, the crashing of timbers, the howling of the wind, the noise of the engines straining full speed ahead to hold their anchorage against the storm, drowned all outcry; the terror, the dismay, the despair of it passed as it were in silence. Within the inlet harbour one vessel crashed against the next and so, huddled in heaps, they drifted to pile themselves in shivered hulks upon the shore. Helpless to help, powerless to save, the spectators clinging like limpets to stone walls and stanchions looked on while one after another the brave ships which but the day before had seemed to spurn the waves in their pride were beaten, buffeted, engulfed, submerged in the seething cauldron of surf and spray and mad, infuriated billows, answering to the challenge of the wind. The *Prince*, the finest vessel in the bay, new built, powerfully engined, held out the longest. There were hopes for her, but the sea willed otherwise. Slowly, slowly the anchor dragged, and five minutes after she struck not a vestige of the good ship remained. Meanwhile on shore the hurricane had brought disaster untold. Houses were roofless, tents swept bodily into the deep ravines with their occupants. It was noon ere the wind abated somewhat, allowing stock to be taken of the damage. Far out at sea could be seen the hulls of the vessels that had weathered the storm, mostly disabled, mastless; but it was known that five-and-twenty vessels had gone down with practically all on board.

As the tempest subsided the bodies of the drowned were dashed by the breakers against the rocks or cast up in tiny creeks upon the beach.

Marrion had taken her charges to a place of safety, the

house she was in being too exposed ; and then, thinking she might help, went down to the harbour. The waves still ran dangerously high, and over on the farther side Englishmen were busy with lifeboats, rescuing some of the crews of the smaller ships which, having held their anchors so far, were still in imminent danger of going down. As she passed a knot of local fishermen on her way to where apparently help might be required, her eyes followed theirs and she realised to her horror that they were calmly looking at a man—a mere boy—who about sixty yards from the shore was clinging to a stationary spar, part doubtless of some submerged craft. His face was clearly visible, the agonised appeal vitalising its exhaustion, its pallor. Only for a few minutes more could that grip hold !

She was alert in an instant.

“Go !” she cried vehemently in Russian. “Quick ! A boat is there ! Quick—save—for Christ’s sake, save !”

Urged more by her actions than her words, the men fell in with them. Ready hands, besides her practised ones, ran down the boat.

But then, no one stirred ! It was not an impossible task, it was only dangerous. That, however, was enough. Why should they risk their lives to save an unknown lad—a mere boy ? But it was that very youth which appealed to the woman, who stood for an instant with bitter anger at her heart.

“Curse you for cowards !” she cried as she sprang in and seized the oars. The boat, already afloat, shot out from the shore by her weight. The next instant she had the oars in and was fighting for her life—and his. For

his—yes, fighting, fighting, fighting for life to something unknown. She set her teeth and dreamed with the appalling swiftness of dreams of the far Northern sea. Yes, she was afloat on it with Duke—no! it was Duke she had to save. It was Duke, or someone belonging to Duke, who clung to that spar now so close, so close——

On shore, a man passing along a quay hard by saw her, and ran down with an oath.

Almost there—almost! She glanced behind her, saw the young face; but only for a second.' The hold of the clenched hands relaxed, the head fell back, the body slid into the water. Too late!

No, not too late! Without one instant's hesitation Marrion was over the side, keeping the oar in her left hand as she leapt.

Now she had gripped something floating for a second and was on the surface again, rising within arm's grip of the oar.

In her ears a thousand voices seemed whispering—Safe, safe, safe! You are the saviour, the creator, the protectress.—She struck out boldly. Then a huge breaker took her to its breast and held her fast.

When she came to herself she was lying on a bed and looking round she realised that she was in the very room of the cavalry hospital where her father had died. It had been the nearest place, she supposed. The sunlight was streaming in. She was quite alone. Doubtless everyone was busy—they always were.

Then on a table within reach she saw a cup of milk and a glass. A paper lay beside them. Scrawled on it, very large, was this advice—

"Take these and go to sleep again!"

It was Doctor Forsyth's writing and with a sense of safety she obeyed.

When she roused again it was evening; the room was almost dark, but a figure stood at the window. In an instant remembrance came back to her and raised a curiosity which had doubtless been lying dormant, as she had been, for nigh six-and-thirty-hours.

"Did I save the boy?" she asked suddenly in a loud strong voice.

Doctor Forsyth, for it was he, smiled as he walked up to the bed.

"I really cannot say, my dear lady, whether you saved him or not. You did your best, anyhow, and the same wave washed you both ashore." He had been feeling her pulse as he spoke. "All right," he continued, "I fancy you can get up if you choose. And you will be a bit busy, for the mail steamer goes to-morrow and you should take the first opportunity of getting home."

She stared at him.

"Home!" she echoed. "I am not going home. I want to work—and I should like to die out here. What is there for me to do at home?"

Doctor Forsyth hesitated a moment. He was ciphering out conclusions. The reason he had to give her was one which must, despite its joy, give pain. Better therefore to speak out while her mind was still too confused to grasp the immensity of either.

"My dear lady," he said, and his voice was gentleness itself, "I must deny all your statements. You are going home. You do not want to die out here, and you will

have plenty to do at home looking after"—he paused—"the colonel's child."

He turned and left her voiceless, but athrill to her finger-tips, wondering why she had not guessed it before.

Then with a rush came remembrance. "People who play Providence——"

She gave a moan and turned her face to the wall.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Marrion arrived in England just before Christmas she found a white world of snow. But it seemed to her not so white, so pure, so chill as that soft pall which had lain on Marmaduke Muir's grave on the Balkan heights, when, stopping at Varna on her way home on purpose to visit it, she had found it unrecognisable under the heavy snow. For the winter of '54-'55 was the severest on record, even in those southern mountains.

There had seemed no room there for her tears, her remorse, her pitiful plaint to be forgiven for trying to play Providence. So she had come away more stunned than ever.

After all her long years of self-sacrifice to find that every step she had taken was a mistake was bitter indeed; but to realise that if the child lived—and this time she meant to ensure that there should be no ransom of her life—she would have deprived Marmaduke's child of its birthright was agony.

Yet there was no escape. Even if Andrew Fraser had been forthcoming—and no news of him had come since Alma's heights were won—she still would not have made a claim. That was over and done with. She had promised the old man none should be made, she had persuaded Duke to do the same, and they must stand by their word.

She brooded and brooded over this until once more self-sacrifice became an obsession with her. Not even for the sake of his child should Duke's honour be smirched. Besides it might be a girl, and then it would not matter so much. Besides, and this clinched the question, even with Andrew it would be hard to prove a marriage; for during those few short years she had not troubled to act as a wife. The knowledge that she was married had been enough for both her and Duke; she had always been known as Mrs. Marsden. A lawsuit would be dreadful—was unthinkable.

No, she could do nothing to rectify her past mistakes. She must dree her weird—she could not get away from her past. In that, as in all things else, the doctor had been right. When the time came nearer she would follow his advice and go to Edinburgh to the man who had invented chloroform. Doctor Forsyth had said he was kind. She would tell him her story and beg him to let her die and save the child.

Meanwhile, there was the gold snuff-box, and it meant more to her now than when it was given. It meant that there would be someone kin to the child—someone who, perhaps, if her life was taken as toll, would look after it. She must try while there was yet time; that was her first charge.

She set to work at once, therefore, to arrange for a visit to Poland. The extraordinary likeness to her father of which he himself had spoken, which Doctor Forsyth had noticed, and which she also had seen, was too valuable an asset to be wasted. Yes, she would go over to the ancestral house, give the gold snuff-box into safe keeping, and ask, even beg, for recognition. Even if her father

had been a widower, one of the sons might be married, there might be a woman with a pitiful heart to listen and sympathise. But ere she went she must write to Peter Muir. To begin with, she could assure him that his brother had been well looked after. And then she had nothing, positively nothing, of Marmaduke's; and Peter, knowing the care she had lavished on him all those years, might give her something. The ring he had always worn was what she craved most. In those long ago days, though there was not so very much difference in their heights, what he wore on his little finger had fitted her second. It had been too large for her third when he had wanted her to wear it in place of a plain gold band; so she had bidden him wear it instead—little tender memory which seemed so precious now.

So she wrote in the fine slanting caligraphy of the day a somewhat stilted little letter asking for what she wanted as a favour, not a demand, since "though I have a claim, I have no right."

In reply she received a friendly note.

"DEAR MARRION,

"If you will come and see me I will give you the ring, *and something else.*"

She had sent her letter to Peter's club, but this was dated from a house in Palace Yard. So she went there. It was a fine old house. A footman opened the door, a butler advanced to meet her, a majordomo out of livery stood half-way up the stairs. Very different this from the old days when the two brothers had been more or less out at elbows all the time; but now, of course, Peter was heir to the estates.

She found him, looking wretchedly ill, in a most luxurious study, and his weak face lit up at the sight of her in the friendliest of fashions.

"Sit down in a comfortable chair," he said, and there was a querulous note in his voice. "Really, in times like these, when, as the paraphrase runs, 'days are dark and friends are few,' and 'gathering clouds' are the normal outlook, it is a duty to be comfortable and bring up the average. When Marmaduke was—was here—he was for ever at me for extravagance. Hated the Jews and used to borrow from old Jack Jardine instead. Paid off something, but not all, I'm afraid; and Pitt, the virtuous Pitt—he owed him thousands. However, as I was saying, it's a duty nowadays to be comfortable, so I've any amount of *post-obits* out—to say nothing of kites. They're always coming back wanting a longer string or a new tail. But I don't care. The old man may outlast me, and anyhow I can't live long; so it's a short life and a merry one."

Looking at his hectic flush and with a damp cold of his hands fresh on the touch of hers Marrion did not feel inclined to combat his easy philosophy.

"And your father?" she asked.

Peter shrugged his shoulders.

"As usual, only more so." He paused and spoke more seriously. "Of course Marmaduke's death cut him to the quick. But I won't speak of that—I can't. He was the only one—and I believe it was the same with the Baron. He showed it in anger. Won't see or hear of me, yet I'd do my best for him. 'Pon my soul, that old man has been the curse of all our lives."

Marrion sat silent. In a way it was true. The old spider had enticed more flies than he knew of into his

net. But for her desire that Marmaduke should not fall foul of his father——

But that way lay madness. She was beginning to learn that she could scarcely trust her own judgment. The whole thing was so pitiful that reason seemed impossible.

“And may I have the ring?” she asked, in order to change the *venue*.

“You can have that, and a good deal more besides,” replied Peter Muir, giving her a queer look as he rose to go to a despatch-box that lay on the table and which Marrion recognised as Marmaduke’s.

“When this thing came home,” he continued, searching in it. “Oh, here is the ring!” (He handed it to her, and she thrilled at the touch of it, as she would have thrilled to the touch of the man who had worn it.) “I did not look over the papers very carefully—I hadn’t the heart; but when I was looking for that ring yesterday, I found—something—which interests you.”

He held out an envelope and she took it indifferently; few things really interested her nowadays. It was addressed to Major Muir at his club, and a vague wonder as to what it could contain crossed her mind as she took out the paper it contained.

Then she sat silent staring at it helplessly, for it was Duke’s counterpart of their marriage bond which she thought she had seen burnt to ashes on that night when Marmaduke had said, “You have made me feel like a scoundrel!”

How idle, how unreal this world was! Could one be sure of anything? Could one be certain that everything was not a dream?

Peter's voice roused her.

"Of course it doesn't make much difference to us now. Marmaduke left a very few pounds, and your third as wife wouldn't amount to anything. But there is his portion when the peer dies, and I can't see why my young oaf of a cousin who will come in eventually should have it; for even if I outlive my father I shall have enough for my time. And you were—well, you were a brick to Marmaduke—and to me, too. You always denied this marriage: but I had a notion it was only denial. There is no reason, therefore, why you shouldn't use this—it is proof positive of marriage, and if I were you I would. You are the only survivor and therefore have the action; besides, it would annoy the old man extremely, and, upon my soul, he deserves all he can get."

He had struck the wrong chord. To Marrion, absorbed in the one enthralling question as to whether Marmaduke had known of this survival or whether he had not, the suggestion that she was the sole arbiter came as a shock.

"We agreed," she said slowly, "to annul the marriage. He thought—I know he thought—this paper had been burnt; and it doesn't make any difference to our intention that it wasn't. And then we promised, we both promised your father no claim should ever be made. Because Duke is dead is that any reason——"

She rose suddenly, walked to the fireplace, and threw the envelope and its contents on the fire.

"That is what Duke meant," she muttered to herself helplessly.

Peter Muir watched her with a half-cynical, half-admiring smile.

"Well, you know best, my dear. And, of course, I personally would never let you come to want." The capable woman looked at him, the incapable man, with wondering tolerance. "Still, I must say I am disappointed. I should like to have seen the governor's face when you sprang it upon him. Remember he is the villain of the piece and, as I said, deserves everything he can get."

"That may be," replied Marrion, "but can't you see we were all at fault? And we have to pay for it. We must—you can't get rid of the past."

She said the words over and over to herself, and it was not till she reached her lodgings that she realised fully that the past had claimed the future. Yet what else could she have done? If she had only known what Duke would have said! Had he found out the paper, or had he not? Was that the reason why in those short ten days of heaven he had never, never, never alluded to the past? And yet that heavenly present had become the past too, and had stretched out into the future. Had she been taken by surprise? Had she made another mistake?

She threw herself on her bed and cried quite foolishly, until perforce, being physically unable to cry any more, her mind reasserted itself and thought came again.

One thing seemed clear. She could not possibly tell what Duke knew or did not know; she could not be sure what he would have thought; and she would have no more of trying to impose her views on him.

That being so, the only person who had any say in the matter was Lord Drummur. For the sake of the heir he might absolve her of the promise. But the child

might be a girl, it might not live. Finally she began to cry again softly, silently ; the tears that count for utter soul-weariness. And in truth she was weary—the one thing that seemed clear being that she had failed ; that she had mismanaged everything, that everything seemed in a hopeless tangle. She was, in sober truth, very near the limit of perfect sanity when, with a passport secured through Peter Muir's Vienna influence, she started for Krakowitz, the village on the Russian side of the Carpathians, near which the Pauloffski estates lay. It was a difficult journey—one which she had judged rightly had better be undertaken at once ; but the change did her good, and she was almost herself again before it came to a conclusion ; yet as the sledge with its tinkling bells and four horses toiled up the last hill or two she felt depression come upon her again. The outlook, supremely beautiful, was still melancholy to a degree. Snow, snow everywhere. The towering peaks, the valleys, the pine forests all burdened with it, like Marmaduke's grave had been. A light burden, but so cold—so deathly cold !

As the sledge dashed up the steep narrow drive and the pine trees that swept their snow layered branches overhead some of their burden fell in soft masses on Marrion's furs.

The driver turned round with a smile and said in Russian :

“That is absolution from sin, Excellency.”

Curious answer to her thoughts, and with the answer came a remembrance, “Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”

And the remembrance brought confidence. Perhaps,

after all, the tangle consequent on her playing Providence might be going to be straightened out.

The front door of the unpretentious tower, with a building like a barn built on to it, that stood magnificently on a little plateau overlooking the valley with a faint glimpse of plain beyond, was wide open, and at it, standing against, but not leaning upon the pilaster, was the most striking figure of a woman Marrion thought she had ever seen. Extreme old age had set its mark on the lined face, with thin white hair drawn under a lace lappet; but the figure was that of a girl of twenty. Extraordinarily tall, massive in proportion, but upright as a dart and with activity in every curve and line.

The lady gave a dignified bow as Marrion, still closely veiled as protection from the bitter cold, came up the steps.

"Princess Pauloffski?" she asked tentatively in French, for it was impossible to think the figure that of a servant.

"I am Princess Pauloffski," was the dignified reply in slightly guttural French.

"Might I speak with you for a few minutes?" continued Marrion nervously.

The Princess smiled.

"Ah, you are English! My son Paul was a long time in England or Scotland," she replied in better English than her French. "You must be cold; come in and take off your wraps."

A few rapid words in the country dialect sent driver and sledge round to the stables while Marrion, with an unforeseen thrill of pleasure, recognised that this beautiful old princess must be her grandmother.

"I was looking for my sons and daughters who are dead," said her hostess quietly as she led the way into the house. "The dead always come back with the snow—and I have so many."

Despite the warmth of the wide passage heated by a huge stove Marrion felt a slight shiver run through her. How had her grandmother learnt to speak of the dead as if they were alive?

As she passed on to a sitting-room where a great fire of pine logs was burning on an open hearth Marrion removed her veil and threw off her heavy fur cloak.

So, as she came out of the dark passage into the sunlight that streamed through the sitting-room windows, she stood revealed. The effect was not nearly as startling as she had anticipated, but it was far more overwhelming.

The old face lit up with sudden pleasure, the thin old hands were stretched out—

"Sacha!" she said. "Darling, after all these years! And you never came before. Paul did—and he was your twin—though he has only just gone, Sacha! I have wanted you so often."

The tears sprang to Marrion's eyes.

"Dear lady," she said, taking the outstretched hands and holding their chilliness of age in her warm clasp, "I am not Sacha. I am Paul's daughter!"

Princess Pauloffski drew back and passed her hand over her eyes.

"Excuse me. I forget. I live so much alone and my dead come to see me so often when there is snow. But if you are not Sacha——" She took a step forward and scanned her visitor narrowly. "You say you are Paul's

daughter—an English daughter—did he then marry over there? For it is true you are his daughter—even his twin was not more like. Come, sit down, child, and tell me how you come by Paul Pauloffski's face?"

It was almost incredible! Marrion as she obeyed her grandmother's gesture felt inexpressible relief. Here there was no haggling, no questioning. She was taken literally on her face value. It was a haven of rest.

Together they sat on the quaint old settle as if they had known each other for years, while Marrion told her tale. She produced the golden snuff-box, with its glittering monogram, and laid it in the old Princess's lap; but she merely glanced at it. Her chilly old hands were busy detaining the hand that had laid it there—the hand that was still alive.

"Yes, Paul is dead," she murmured, half to herself. "Sacha died first when she was so beautiful, like you. And Paul's wife died, and now his two sons are gone; there is none left but me, and I am very old. And now you come—tell me more, child!"

And Marrion went on with the story. It was like a dream to be sitting there in the streaming sunlight heart to heart as it were with someone of whose very existence she had been unaware but one short half-hour before.

"Was he a commoner or noble?" asked the old princess quickly, when Marrion mentioned her marriage.

"He had no title then," began the latter.

The old fingers tightened their curiously protecting clasp.

"Then you are still Princess Pauloffski! I am glad," was interrupted with satisfaction. "We of this house do not change our names when we marry beneath us, as

I did; for, my dear, this, the soil"—she waved her other hand in an all-embracing gesture—"was my father's, and my father's father's. My husband was a good kind man. I loved him—but—— Go on, child."

And Marrion went on.

"Now, God be praised!—God in His High Heaven be praised!" cried the old Princess exultantly. "And you here—braving the cold, spending your life!" She seized a little brazen bell that lay on the table beside her and rang it violently. A very old maid-servant appeared, and was addressed volubly in patois. But that many orders were given Marrion judged by the frequent bob curtsy of the domestic who finally trotted out in great haste.

"Not one word more, darling!" cried the old woman, forgetful of everything save abounding sympathy. "Quick, to the fire! Toast your feet—so! Lean back on the cushions! Make yourself quite comfortable. Remember you have to think of someone besides yourself." She dragged an armchair closer to the hearth with all the strength of youth. She bustled the cushions to shape; she removed Marrion's hat and finally kissed her softly on the forehead with a murmured, "God bless you both!"

It was too much. Marrion dissolved into slow quiet tears. For the first time since Doctor Forsyth had told her why she must go home she felt really that she was blessed amongst women—yea, amongst women like this one!

"But you don't know!" she half sobbed. "You haven't looked to see. I may be an impostor."

"Not with that face, dearie," beamed the old Princess.

"Cry on! The tears will warm your heart. It has been cold, I expect, and little ones don't thrive when the heart above them is cold. Ah, here comes Magda with the posset!"

And Marrion drank something hot and spicy and delicious while the mistress discoursed to the old serving-maid and the old serving-maid finally fell at Marrion's feet and positively worshipped her.

It was all so bewildering, so unexpected, that Marrion just lay back and let the slow tears trickle down her cheeks in quiet orderly fashion. The puzzlement, the regrets of the last few months, seemed to vanish. For a while, in stress of these new emotions, she forgot even her grief for Duke.

But as the two women, the old and the young one, sat and talked after the sledge had been sent away, and Marrion had been simply commanded to remain for at least a week to rest, there was enough of grief and to spare in their conversation, besides Marmaduke's death—over which the Princess was vaguely sympathetic—since, though he had been a British soldier, he had, by the decree of Providence, not drawn his sword as an enemy. And Marrion had been as an angel of mercy healing Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics without distinction. Had she not closed the eyes of her own father?

"I knew that he was dead," said the firm old voice, "though he was only reported as missing; for he came back as the children of this old house always do come back to see it once more. Alexis and Danish both came also—they were fine young fellows, and I wept when the news came; but they died as Pauloffskis should die, fighting for the master. And I have wept—dear heart!

how I have wept to think that never again would a real son of the real race rule over the barren acres; for, see you, there are no near collaterals. The Pauloffski men die young, fighting, as my sons and grandsons died. But now"—she clasped her hands ecstatically—"now there will be an heir."

"Supposing it is a girl," suggested Marrion, half laughing, half crying.

The old woman swept her hands out in an indignant unconcern.

"What matters it? A child is ever a child! Ever a chip of the old block, ever a fresh root of an old race. We have no Salic law here in Russia. A princess is as a prince; mayhap better for the old acres, as she does not spend so much money!"

Marrion, accustomed to the rigid rules made by men, listened amazed and interested; but indeed every word that fell from Princess Pauloffski's lips seemed to tighten the bond between them.

She had often wondered when she found herself—as she had done so often—at loggerheads with her *milieu* whether she was like her father. Now she knew that she had inherited even her faults from this strange weird old woman who lived a lonely life amongst the pine forests, who saw dead people and yet ruled her domains with absolute despotism. Marrion had never had a really intimate woman friend before. She found one here, and, as if by magic, all her doubts and fears vanished. There was but one thing she kept to herself, and that was the possible difficulty which might arise in proving the future little Prince or Princess Pauloffski's title, if legal proof of his or her parents' marriage was not forthcoming. But it was only a possible difficulty.

For all she knew in this land where women seemed to stand equal with men, a right coming to a child through its mother might be inalienable. She did not know. She did not care to ask. For the time being, she was happy as never before in all her life she had been happy. The ten days' paradise with Duke had not been of this world. But even so it had been restless. The happiness had been felt. Here one did not think, did not feel. One was content.

So she wandered with the old Princess, her grandmother—who, though she was past eighty, still walked like a girl—through the pine woods. She visited the peasants' cottages where, after voluble discoursings, the women always fell at her feet and worshipped her. She came back to frugal meals and quiet evenings, when the Princess would discourse over every subject under the sun; for she was a great reader and brought a shrewd feminine wit to bear on most problems. And the most startling thing about it was that never for one instant did she admit the slightest inferiority due to her sex.

"Men think so," she would say, "but they are wrong. By nature they are hunters and fighters and thinkers. It is the women who manage the affairs. It will be better for the world when this is recognised."

In those days this was rank heresy, and even Marrion hesitated to admit its truth. But the most remarkable thing about her grandmother was the stable youthfulness of her outlook. Nothing seemed to affect it. Death itself made way for her strong personality.

So the days passed to weeks, the weeks to more than a month, and Marrion still lingered. A very different heritage this from the storm-set cliffs, the rich fields of Aberdeenshire. And a different ancestress this from

the wild, wicked old man, spinning his spider's-web round his very children.

Should she, after all, go and ask him to let her break her promise for the sake of the heir? Would it not be better to let the heirship of evil slip, and choose the heirship of good?

The question was still undecided when, after many delays, she set foot on English ground again. And then the first thing to meet her eyes in the newspaper was the death of Marmaduke, sixteenth Baron Drummuir. There was a whole column about his many virtues; a vague reference to "sprightly youth" summing up his vices. The article ended thus: "The title descends to the late peer's third son Peter, who, we regret to learn, is in a very delicate state of health. None of the late lord's sons having any issue, the heir presumptive is a distant cousin, etc."

Marrion felt vaguely relieved. Unless Andrew Fraser turned up—and he, she knew, if he saw Marmaduke's child, would move heaven and earth to establish his claim to the title—she was quit of Drummuir. But had she any right to be quit of it? The old arguments for and against came back; she began to worry over them once more, especially when the verdict of the Edinburgh specialist to whom she told her tale with passionate assurances that a child's life was always more valuable than a woman's, came succinctly and to the point.

"In this case, my dear lady, the question does not appear to me to enter. With care I see no reason why both should not survive."

It was something of a shock, for it materialised many doubts, many difficulties.

CHAPTER XII

THE spring had passed to early summer when Marrion, with her little son in her arms, sat in a sheltered nook among the cliffs on the Aberdeenshire coast, looking northwards over the curved sea-line towards the promontory some fifteen miles away, on which she knew the old castle of Drummuir stood as it had stood for centuries. But she could not see it with her physical eyes, and even in her mental ones it bulked but little.

For the great protective possession of motherhood had overwhelmed her, and her very regret and remembrance of Marmaduke only made her hug her child closer—as his, and hers.

At first when she realised that life spread before both her and the little Marmaduke she had agonised over the thought that by her own act she had deprived him of his birthright; but by degrees she became more content as she persuaded herself that that fateful envelope could scarcely have remained in Marmaduke's despatch-box without his knowledge. Yet he had never mentioned it. If he had repented of the action which at the time he had said made him feel like a scoundrel he could have amended it. And he had not done so. Never, never had he breathed one word to show that he held her, whom he had so tardily learnt to love, as his wife.

And here in her chain of reasoning she always stopped ;

for she knew—how could she help knowing?—that if he had lived—if—if—— Always that if, and if life had to be lived, it must be set aside. And life had to be lived.

This brought her back to the child in her arms, and she dreamt happily enough of the future.

It was not as if the boy had no home. As long as Princess Pauloffski ruled over the pine woods, the quaint homely farmhouses, and the devoted peasants, little Marmaduke would have more than welcome; for every week brought ecstatic letters from that entrancing personality which had already made such a mark on Marrion's character. In a way she felt that she had never understood her own womanhood until she had met with the all-embracing femininity of the brave, wise, old mind which seemed to hold a grip of the whole world in its very isolation and solitude.

Yes, the child could have no better home; and even when the commanding, lovable figure passed, it might be that he would remain as heir.

So Marrion was in a fever to have the child there, yet at the back of her mind was a vague regret; and she had chosen the little Aberdeenshire fishing village as the place for her convalescence because from it she could see the view of her childhood and girlhood—see right away to Rattray Head and beyond it——? The North Pole!

She was not afraid of being recognised. Fifteen miles in the country effaces all familiarity, and she kept much to herself, taking the child down with her day after day, to some sheltered sandy nook, where in the hot June weather she could sit and dream—rather idly, it must be confessed, for the sheer delight of living to have a living child had absorbed her mind. So the days passed,

until for the last time she carried it down to her favourite beach.

The dry warm sand was a perfect cradle for the child. She scraped a little hollow in it at her feet, laid her treasure down, and sat on a boulder beside it, in absolute worship. The waves, always restless on the North Sea, tinkled a lullaby on the rocks hard by.

She was roused by the sound of a footstep. So few folk ever passed that she looked up surprised. Then she gave a glad cry and stood up holding out both hands; for it was Andrew Fraser. He also held out a hand, for one empty sleeve of his coat was pinned to his breast. He came rapidly towards her, seemingly unobservant of the child, till within a few feet of her. Then he stopped dead and stared at what lay at her feet.

"I didna know," he said, brokenly at last. "They didna say—— God, but I'm glad, Marrion! Oh, Marrion, I'm glad!"

Then without waiting to greet her he knelt down for a closer look. "He's a real Drummuir," he went on ecstatically, "and he *is* Drummuir! Ah," he added, a trifle irrationally, "that the colonel could ha' lived to see little Lord Drummuir!"

Something gripped at Marrion's heart.

"Don't let us speak of that now, Andrew," she said hastily. "I want to know—everything—your poor arm——"

But Andrew for the time being was entranced.

"It's me," he said, "is wanting to know! And how old will he be? And why did the doctor fellow no tell me when he tauld me about you?"

It was not easy to beguile him from the subject, but

bit by bit Marrion got from him a sparse account of how he had been a Russian prisoner, how he had lost his arm, had been exchanged as disabled, and in Balaklava had come across Doctor Forsyth, who had given him an address in Edinburgh where he would be sure to hear of Marrion. How it was a doctor fellow who had been too busy to do more than supply him with the name of the village, whither he had come to find——

Here Marrion, recognising that all roads must lead to the one point, took heart of grace and said gently—

“Me and my child. It has made me very happy, Andrew. And I am so glad you found me to-day, for I am going away to-morrow.”

Andrew stood up.

“Goin’ whaur?” he asked sharply. “Tae Drummuir? An’ why are ye not there the now?”

“Because I have no right there, Andrew,” she replied, feeling herself tremble, despite the boldness of her words.

“Ye may have nane, woman,” he broke in sternly, “but your child has the right to all! Are ye gain’ tae steal it frae him? An’ it’s foolishness tae talk your way; ye ken fine that before God and man ye’re the colonel’s wife!”

“That may be,” she retorted, “but as I told you long ago there is no legal proof of it—and I do not choose—I have settled what I think right, and I can have no interference.”

“An’ is it what *you* wish that is tae take the birthright from an innocent wean that canna speak for himself?” burst in Andrew passionately. “I tell ye, Marrion, that neither you nor the colonel—God rest him for a brave gentleman—have any right tae order yon poor scrap o’

God's makin'. I tell ye he was born to be Drummuir o' Drummuir, an' Drummuir o' Drummuir he'll be till the last trump!"

He paused, breathless with anger and resentment while Marrion stood speechless, the babe between them lying placidly asleep.

"But Andrew——" she began helplessly.

"But I'll no thole it," he continued, his whole ugly face aflame with an emotion which made it almost beautiful. "See here, Marrion Muir—for that you are—I've lived my life thinkin' ye were abune me, but ye'll be beneath me if ye steal the very name from that poor bairn. But ye sall not do it. I'll awa to Peter Muir and tell him——"

The threat roused her and she turned on him.

"You can do as you like, Andrew; but it will be no use. You can't do anything without me. I wish you would be reasonable and listen! We promised—the colonel and I promised—we both promised—and we promised each other——"

"Ye had na the right tae promise!" he interrupted fiercely. "An' I'll hear nae mair o' your woman's clatter. Yon babe's my master's son an' Lord Drummuir, sae I doff ma cap to him."

Which he did in the stateliest fashion, and then stalked away without another word, leaving Marrion confronted with a host of new difficulties.

She lifted the child up and carried him back to her lodgings, feeling she could do nothing to save the situation. There was little hope of getting Andrew to listen to—no, not to reason, that had long ceased to have any part in the strange catalogue of mistakes—but to listen to what she had to say.

And what had she to say? Her mind began laboriously on the past, counting her own mistakes. Why had she done this? Why had she done that? It was fear that had made her do everything—fear of the old man who sat like a spider in his web, the old man whom his own son had wished her to anger, because he had been throughout the villain of the piece! But would he have been so if she had given him the chance?

“I am sorry the little chap died; he would have been game.”

The memory of those parting words stung her to the quick. What a fool she had been! Why had she not gone at once to Lord Drummuir and told him the truth? She had meant to do so, but she had been too late—too late! Well, there was no use crying over spilt milk.

So she sat going over and over the whole thing again, and yet again, until late in the evening the little lassie of the lodgings brought her a message that a man who was lying at Mistress McMurdo's was feelin' ill and would like to see her just for a little. The child being asleep she slipped over to the cottage to find Andrew Fraser once more a prey to his old enemy, tropical fever—a quaint, insistent enemy which, after lying low for years, will seize advantage of any disturbance of mind or body to reassert itself.

So there he was, as she had seen him before, trembling and shaking, with a glitter in his eyes and a flush on his face, lying huddled up under his military cloak on the sofa. Once again he slipped his feet apologetically to the ground as he saw her and essayed to stand straight—a pathetic sight, his body weak, his mind strong—so strong!

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he said, with studied ceremony, "if I was over-heated the day, for you're my master's wife. But it's no oorsels, ye see. It's just Providence, an' we daurna play Providence. It's dangerous work. Sae I couldna help it, ma'am. The wean's Drummuir o' Drummuir——"

And there he was going over the old ground again and again.

She could but try to soothe him and leave him, knowing in her heart of hearts that nothing she could say would ever move him one hair's-breadth from what he thought right.

She spent a restless night; she could scarcely do otherwise.

"Are you gaun to steal the very name frae the puir bairn?" was sufficient to keep her awake. Once more she found herself in a maelstrom of doubt. Wearied out, the first blink of dawn rising clear and lucent over the dark sea seemed to her a godsend. She crept out of her bed leaving the child asleep, and, dressing herself, wrapped a cloak about her, and so seating herself on a rock at the very edge of the cliff within earshot of the cottage where she lodged, set herself once more to watch the peaceful coming of light, which had so often brought her wisdom.

So had it looked that dawning when she and Duke—ah! always, always she and Duke! How curiously Fate had joined them. Yet she had disregarded Fate's handiwork even while she had told herself she had been aiding it.

Far over in the east the light was growing. So it had grown that morning when she and Duke swam——

She seemed to feel his arm on her shoulders, the touch of her arm on his neck, the cold kiss of the bitter sea stinging soul and body to new joyous life. She saw his happy face alight with laughter.

"Look! Isn't it worth it?"

Yes, it had been worth it, well worth it! And even as on that distant June morning while she looked, the restless dark horizon of the sea seemed to melt and soften, and the path of radiant gold sent by the first ray of the rising sun seemed to touch her feet and bring her answer—

Yes, life was well worth it indeed!

Who was she to cavil at what Fate had done? Who was she to worry over what she thought she had done? Comprehension came to her, she saw a clear and ordered sequence in which even her mistakes bore their fitting fruit. Life seemed to hold no cares, no errors, no animosities.

What was it Duke had said about taking too much wine that night?

"I shan't do it again, but I shouldn't have had this perfectly stunning time if I hadn't, should I?"

So it was in her life. She had had joy through her mistakes. She and her Love had been alone in the Great Sea of Time battling with the waves as best they could.

Nothing else mattered. They might be waifs on that sea, but they were together.

She slipped to her knees and watched the sun rise. Over how many mistakes, how many wasted minutes and opportunities and lives!

Wasted? No—not wasted. Even mistakes had their appointed place. Even the old man who had made the

castle over yonder a spider's-web of evil was part of the Great Plan.

Slowly the light grew. The cottages below in the tiny fishing village began to send up thin blue threads of smoke. The figure of a man or a woman began to pass along the narrow causeway. And someone came up the steps towards her cottage, then paused, seeing her.

"Ye'll be Mistress Marsden likely," he said, "for I've no seen ye before. There's a saxpence tae pay, but ye can gie it to the lassie for me till I come back."

The postman handed her a letter as he spoke and went on his way, for his round was a long one.

She looked at the envelope curiously. The original address was almost undecipherable, being defaced with innumerable new ones, or brief notices, "Gone away;" "Try so and so."

Still the name was hers. A bill likely, sent to her old London address and forwarded to the Crimea and back again. Twice, so it seemed to her as she tried to decipher the postmarks.

Then she opened it, noting with a vague spasm of memory that a curious embossed presentment of foxhounds in full cry ran right across the flap. Where had she seen that device before?

Surely on some envelope that Marmaduke—

The writing too was vaguely familiar. The writing of a person with brains, but strangely shaky and irregular:

"DEAR MADAM,

"Since my son Marmaduke has chosen to deprive me of the possibility of an heir by dying—not even on the

field of battle—out at Varna, I return the enclosed. I don't know why I kept it. To have a hold over the young man at bottom, I expect. Perhaps for other reasons. One doesn't often meet women of your description. Anyhow, I haven't.

"You can now claim your position and dowry, which my d——d cousin can very well afford to pay.

"Besides, you are worth providing for; more, at any rate than my Lady and Penelope, and I have done that. So I die quits; except for my son Peter. Why didn't he get cholera instead of Marmaduke? I could have spared him.

"Yours,

"DRUMMUIR."

The enclosure was the copy of the marriage lines which she thought she had seen the old lord in the act of destroying as she had left the room.

Yes, across the middle fold the beginning of a tear slit the paper.

She sat with the letter in her hand until the cry of a child made her rise hastily and go to her task of motherhood.

L'ENVOI

"AND you mean to say," said Peter Muir, when he had heard her tale, "that knowing this imp," he looked at the child she carried, "who is to turn me out, was on the way you burnt that paper found in Marmaduke's despatch-box? I give up. Thank God one does not often meet women of your description!"

But as he spoke he was looking in the child's face.

"He will be the image of his father," he remarked at last, "and, dash it all! but I am glad, yes, glad he's here!" Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he turned away. "It will be a sell for the Jews, I'm afraid, though it serves the horse-leeches very well right!"

"It need not be a sell at all," replied Marrion. "The child shall have the title—he must have that—but not one penny of the money shall he take till the debts are paid, Mr. Peter! I know the law. I have studied it to find out where I stand; and you are the boy's natural guardian. I"—she spoke bitterly—"am only the mother. I have no say. But I am going to buy freedom from you. Live here—promise me that—use the monies as your own. Keep the old place up for the child; but I will take him for myself. I will bring him up away from the evil traditions of this old house, and when he comes back to it, a man grown, he will be different—even from his father—even, I hope, from me!"

So she said then, but as the years passed little Lord

Drummuir came more than once to visit his invalid uncle, for Peter, away from the excitements of town life, defied the doctors for a time. And from the Carpathian pine woods the little lad travelled more than once to a solitary cairn on the Balkan hills by the side of which Andrew Fraser—who never ceased rejoicing that his plain speaking had shown Marrion the wickedness of stealing the bairn's name—would tell him marvellous tales of the dead colonel, his father, and of his prowess in every way.

The honest fellow had but one care. The double title was the fly in the honey-pot, and when the old Princess would ask, "Where is Prince Pauloffski?" Andrew would invariably reply: "Lord Drummuir is waiting on his mother."

Thus the game of life went on and it was well worth it.

But perhaps, as Marrion often told herself, the honours lay with one who in that life had been the curse of his family.

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